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THE BIBLE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.

TRANSLATED FROM THE DUTCH WITH THE SANCTION AND
ASSISTANCE OF THE AUTHORS.

BY

PHILIP H. WICKSTEED, M.A.

THE HOUSE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

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THE BIBLE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.

BY

DR. H. OORT,

PROFESSOR OF ORIENTAL LANGUAGES, ETC., AT AMSTERDAM,

AND

DR. I. HOOYKAAS,

PASTOR AT ROTTERDAM,

WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF

DR. A. KUENEN,

PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY AT LEIDEN.

VOL. I.

PREPARED BY DR. H. OORT.

Authorised Translation.

WILLIAMS & NORGATE, 4, HENRIETTA ST., COVENT GARDEN, LONDON;
AND 20, SOUTH FREDERICK ST., EDINBURGH,

1873.

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California

TO MY GODCHILD

E. A. A.

I DEDICATE THIS TRANSLATION.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

IN preparing the first volume of the "Bible for Young People" for the English reader, it has been my wish never to pass from the functions of the Translator to those of the Editor. In other words, I have endeavoured faithfully to give the meaning of the original, without in any case modifying it to suit my own taste or opinions, or thinking it necessary to signify my dissent where I cannot personally adopt its conclusions.

On the other hand, in a few passages where the original contains allusions and explanations the point of which depends entirely upon their being addressed to Dutchmen, it has been necessary either to omit a few words altogether, or to substitute the best English equivalents that could be found. In the same way, where the readings or translations adopted by the authors simply differ from those of the Dutch "States' Translation," no notice has been taken of the fact; but when, in the better-known portions of the Bible, they differ in important points from those of our so-called "Authorised Version" (executed by the command of James I., and completed in 1611), a note has frequently been added to call attention to the fact.

The proofs of this translation have always been submitted to the examination of Dr. Oort, and he has thus had the opportunity of assuring himself and the public of its faithfulness, at least in all essential points, and at the same time

of introducing a considerable number of modifications of more or less importance, suggested by his own continued studies, or by works of other scholars which have appeared since the original publication of this volume.

I have also to express my obligations to Mr. W. Blake Odgers, of the Middle Temple, who has looked through all the proofs, and, while by no means responsible for any blemishes of style yet remaining in this translation, has done much to reduce their number.

I must also offer my warmest thanks to the friends whose liberality has enabled me to publish this volume.

It only remains to give the reader some indication of the share which each of the three scholars, whose names appear on the title page, has had in the execution of the work. Dr. Oort is responsible for the portion which deals with the Old Testament; but his work has always been submitted, before publication, to the careful examination of Dr. Hooykaas and Dr. Kuenen. By this means the chance of any inaccuracies finding their way into the book has been made as small as possible, and at the same time the author has secured the advantage of suggestions from two independent sources.

In the same way, Dr. Hooykaas, who has undertaken the New Testament, has throughout enjoyed the assistance and advice of Dr. Oort and Dr. Kuenen.

P. H. W.

Dukinfield, 1873.

A WORD OF PREFACE.

DEAR READER,

BE good enough not to skip this *Word of Preface*, for we have one or two things to tell you which it is absolutely necessary for you to know, if you are really to understand what follows; things, too, which may serve to show you the quickest way into the heart of our book.

We are ready to take a long walk with you; and if we did not think ourselves pretty well acquainted with the district through which our path will run, we should not venture to offer ourselves as guides. But our studies, our social calling, and our personal inclination have led us through the country so often that we know where to look for all the lovely little spots, all the magnificent views, all the wonderful panoramas, which it will be our delight to point out to you. And if there are places with which we are not very familiar—the way is so long and we have so many little excursions to make to the right or left—if there are places, then, to which someone else perhaps might be a better guide, we trust that we shall always keep in the right direction at least. Be this as it may, we venture to promise our companions that they will not regret having accompanied us.

You may see from the title-page of our book that the country through which our walk will lead us is the Bible.

Of course you have already gained some knowledge of this book. And yet, properly speaking, it is not *a* book at all, but two collections joined together. The first of these collections, which includes thirty-nine books according to the usual reckoning, is the Sacred Book of the Jews ; while this same collection, together with the second, which embraces twenty-seven writings, makes up the Sacred Book of the Christians.

Several of the most important religions have a Sacred Book of this sort. Thus, the Koran is the Sacred Book of the Mohammedan, the Zend-Avesta of the Persian, the Veda of the Brahmin, the Kings of the Chinese religion. Of course we Christians attach most importance to the Bible ; and, indeed, every impartial judge must allow that no other Sacred Book can bear comparison with it, or approaches it in beauty, truth, and value. It does not lie in our way, however, to make any such comparisons ; but we hope that what we have to say will convince you that we may safely call our Bible a mine of gold, and that some parts of it are of priceless worth. So we will not speak in praise of it just now, as it will be better for you to end, than for us to begin, by doing so.

Just one remark, however, on the character of the Bible.

From various points of view it deserves to be highly prized. It is of inestimable value, for instance, for our knowledge of antiquity, since it contains almost our only authorities for the history of Israel and the origin of Christianity. Some parts of it, too, have seldom been equalled as works of art, and may therefore serve to ennoble our taste and elevate our sense of beauty. But, above all, the Bible is the book of religion.

Observe, we do not say—the book of *our* religion, but of *religion*. Not that we would treat the other Sacred Books as of no value. Far from it. Hindoos and Persians, Egyptians and Greeks, have thought of God and the invisible as earnestly

as the Israelites; and what the men of greatest piety and genius among these peoples have believed, what the founders of religion or the philosophers among them have declared, so far as it has been preserved to us in writing, not only in their sacred books but elsewhere too, furnishes no small amount that might safely be placed by the side of many portions of the Old Testament at least. Nor can we assert that every part of the Bible gives us a pure reflection of God's being and God's will. Time after time we shall be compelled to allow that the writers of the books of the Bible were men—constantly going astray, as such, in their search for the way to God. But we call the Bible the book of religion because the place of honour in the religious life of mankind and of each man in particular belongs to the person of Jesus, and because it is upon Jesus that the whole Bible turns. In this lies the value not only of the New Testament, a great part of which refers to him directly, but of the Old Testament as well. It is true that many of the Israelite writings are important even in themselves, for they give us a glance into the spiritual life of the nations of antiquity, into their social, political, moral, and religious condition; but yet the Old Testament would lose very much of its charm, and the whole course of the Israelite religion would have much less interest for us, had not Jesus been a child of Israel, and were not Christianity in so many respects connected with the religion of this race.

We hope that we shall never lose sight of the fact that the Bible is the book of religion while we are speaking of its stories, and that so we may gradually find a direct or indirect answer to the questions, "Who and what is God for us?" and "What are we to do and what to leave undone?" for it is our heartfelt desire and the highest object of our efforts, to quicken the conscience of our readers, and to make their religious feelings deeper and purer. Nor do we leave this

object out of view in contributing to their knowledge, more especially of the history of the Israelite and the Christian religion, for we believe that this history clears our insight into the ways of God with man, and gives us the key to many perplexing facts in the region of religion.

In thus looking at the Bible from a distinctly religious point of view, we are in perfect harmony with its writers ; even with such of them as adopt the narrative style, and will therefore engage the greatest share of our attention. For when the books of the Old Testament were set aside and preserved as a Sacred Book by the Jews, and those of the New Testament were added to them by the Christians, it was with no idea of drawing knowledge of nature or history from them, but because they recognised them as the rule of faith and conduct ; and in the same way the writers themselves prepared their works and gave publicity to them, not simply or chiefly in order to make their readers accurately acquainted with the past, but to promulgate and recommend what seemed to them to be religious truth. Even the historical writings, both of the Old and the New Testaments, were composed with a religious object, to instruct and to guide, to rouse or to encourage, to exhort or to console contemporaries or posterity.

Up to a certain point it falls in very happily with our purpose, that the writers of the Bible made use of their narratives as the vehicle of religious truths ; for it gives us the opportunity, without our having to seek it, of treating them in the same spirit. But, on the other hand, it throws many difficulties in our way. For, in the eyes of the writers, everything was subordinate to their object, so that they often sacrificed what we consider very important interests to it—historical truth, for example. As a rule, they concerned themselves very little with the question whether what they narrated really happened so or not ; and

their readers were just as far from exercising what is now known as "historical criticism." If a narrative was edifying, if its tendency fell in with the tastes of the readers, then they called it true; while those whose point of view or whose sympathies were opposed to theirs called it untrue, and sometimes set up another story, purely invented, which agreed better with their ideas, in opposition to it. Thus, a *legend* might serve the purpose of the writers just as well as the true account of something that really happened. This is why the Old and New Testaments are so full of legends.

Now, if our only object were to make religious and moral sketches, then these characteristics of so many of the Biblical narratives would give us but little trouble; but since we wish at the same time to explain the history of Israel and its religion, of Jesus and the apostolic age, the character of many of the narratives from which we draw, in the first place, makes it our duty always to apply a severe criticism to them, to see whether they are reliable or not, and, in the second place, compels us to prefix an introduction to our exposition of the narratives of the Old Testament, and another to those of the New, and now and then to speak of them in a different order from that in which they come before us in the Bible.

II.

We must illustrate this matter more in detail. We have spoken of "legends," and before we go on we must give ourselves some account of their significance and value. Let us take one that is not borrowed from the Bible as an example.

Do you know the legend of the Drachenfels¹?

When the tourist, as he ascends the Rhine, has left Bonn behind him, he comes to the Siebengebirge. Right in front the

¹ That is Dragon Cliff.

Drachenfels rears its head to a height of nearly a thousand feet. The aspect of this mountain when looked at from below is very impressive, and there is something about it which works powerfully upon the imagination. If you climb its slope to enjoy from its summit one of those entrancing views far away over the river, on the ridge of the mountain you find a gloomy chasm. Ages ago, when all were heathens yet, so your guide will tell you, this was the den of a horrible dragon, the terror and the curse of all the country round, for its food was human flesh. That they might not fall victims to its ravenous appetite themselves, the inhabitants of the district were compelled to pacify it at regular seasons. So they made war upon the neighbouring tribes and brought their prisoners to the monster. And this went on for many a year. But once upon a time they had taken captive in one of their marauding expeditions a girl of extraordinary beauty. They all agreed to offer her to the monster, in the hope that so choice a prey might satisfy its thirst for blood for a long time to come. The youthful captive, when they told her of her fate, gave no signs of despair or terror, but begged that she might be led to the murderous den just as she stood, with everything she had about her. Her wish was readily granted. Then she stepped, in her white garment, calm and resigned, up to the place of horror. There, roaring and breathing flames, the dragon shot into sight to hurl itself upon its victim. Its claws had already darted forth, and its jaws gaped upon the prey, . . . when she drew from her bosom a wooden cross, and held it up before the monster. At this sight—to the great amazement of the lookers on, who did not know what the cross was, and saw nothing particular in it—the dragon drew back confounded, shrank together in convulsions, with a frightful howl, and vanished into its den, never to show its face again. It had sunk before the magic

power of the cross, and in grateful joy the whole population of the district was converted as a single man to the religion of the crucified.

Here we have a German legend; and its meaning is not hard to find. It is the conquest of Christianity over Heathenism painted in living colours for us. The dragon is the Heathen religion which demanded so many human sacrifices, especially of prisoners of war. These sacrifices were generally made on the mountains, which were looked upon as the dwelling places of the gods. From this curse, which weighed heavily upon the land, the inhabitants were delivered by Christianity, which is represented by the beautiful young maiden, in her spotless garment, who steps boldly forward and puts the hellish power to flight by the sign of the cross. In this legend, then, we seem to catch the joyful shout of those redeemed from the power of heathenism, with all its abominations, and their grateful recognition of the heavenly purity and invincible might of the Gospel.

We shall use the word *legend*—originally the name of the highly embellished traditions about the saints of the Roman Catholic church—for every narrative which is not trustworthy, but is nevertheless given us as history. By this characteristic it is distinguished from the *fable*, the hearers or readers of which are warned beforehand, as it were, that the story is invented. In this sense the legend includes the *myth*—properly a Greek word, which means “story,” and was applied to accounts of the gods, fables of animals, and all kinds of tales. As a rule, the words “legend” and “myth,” as well as “saga,” are used for one another, and in a different way by almost every writer on this subject. We shall call those stories *myths* in which the powers or phenomena of nature, represented as gods or men, are introduced as agents.

An example of this, too !

We borrow it from the Hindoo theology, from the songs of the Veda, which mention it repeatedly ; and we choose this specimen because it is one of the oldest myths of mankind, and we find traces of it in the Greek and Latin mythologies, under the form of the labours of Hercules, as well as in the old literature of the Persians and Germans. In brief, it runs as follows :—Indra, the national god, keeps a herd of purple cows. Vritra, a wicked spirit with three heads and the body of a monster serpent, steals the cows and shuts them up in his den. Indra pursues the thief, breaks through into his abode, gives him a sound thrashing, and brings the cows back to heaven, while their milk is poured out over the earth.

The meaning of this myth can be given in a single word. It is the description of a thunderstorm. The purple cows are the clouds which hold the gentle rain. Indra is the god of day, and when the wicked spirit tries to carry away the clouds and so parch the earth with drought, he compels him to release them. But in giving this account of the meaning of the myth, we must bear in mind that what we now regard as poetical personification, was looked upon as a complete expression of the truth by the ancients ; we must put ourselves into the position of men who saw the immediate activity of Divine beings in all the phenomena of nature. Imagine, then, the sudden approach of a heavy thunderstorm, as seen in mountainous districts. The earth gasps for rain. Prayers rise on high continually to Indra, the god of blessings. They seem to have been heard, for see ! the clear-coloured clouds rise above the horizon ; they are the cows of Indra, and he is going to milk them to make the earth fruitful. They come. Soon may they yield their treasures ! . . . But, alas ! they seem to be drawing off again. A dark shadow falls over

them. Vritra, the serpent, whose breath parches the world, shuts up the cows of Indra in his gloomy den. A rumble of the distant thunder! It is the smothered lowing of the kine. Indra, the benefactor of mankind, advances to the battle, now alone, and now surrounded by the bands of howling winds. The thundering blows of the divine battle-axe may be heard, falling upon the cave. It bursts, and flames pour out from it. The trident spear of the serpent flickers through the darkness. At last the battle is over. The heavy shadow of cloud changes its shape, bursts, vanishes. At the same time the waters which it held imprisoned stream pattering on the earth below. Hurrah! Indra is milking the cows of heaven, and then, as the blue sky, he appears himself, in all the triumph of his glory.

You will see from these few hints that legends may be of very various nature and origin. Sometimes historical recollections play a chief part in them, and sometimes myths; here they have sprung up spontaneously, there again they have been expressly elaborated to give a visible shape to the author's impressions or thoughts. In either case they are of great value to us. It is true that they are not always improving; sometimes an unholy spirit speaks through them. That depends on the character of the men in the midst of whom they had their origin. But in every case they reveal something of the inner life of these men—of their thoughts, beliefs, hopes, fears; and now and then they make us acquainted with historical facts.

It stands to reason that we must go to work with the utmost caution when we draw our inferences from a legend, or use it as a contribution to our knowledge of the past. As a rule, indeed, it teaches us nothing about the period in which it places us, but it does teach us something about that in which it was invented, or in which it sprang up. We consult the legend of the Drachenfels in vain for the particu-

lars of the contest of Christianity and its conquest over the German heathenism ; but it gives us a picture of the thankful joy of the Christians on the banks of the Rhine, as they looked back upon the wretched condition in which they had lived as heathens. From the myth of Indra we can draw no knowledge of nature or of God, but it introduces us to the religious views of nature held by the Hindoos.

The same holds good of the Israelite and early Christian legends. The accounts of the fortunes of the patriarchs teach us very little about a hoary pre-historic age ; those of the birth and childhood of Jesus hardly anything about the first years of his life. If we took up the legend of Balaam in connection with the Mosaic age, we should form a thoroughly untrue conception of it ; if we looked to the Transfiguration on the mount for light on the history of Jesus, we should be bitterly disappointed. The evidence put in by all these narratives concerns times long after those into which they transport us ; so that they cannot be understood or consulted to any purpose until we are acquainted to some extent with the character of these later times, with the modes of thought, the diverging tendencies, the social or religious condition of the men in the midst of whom the legend arose. So, for example, if we are to understand the story of Balaam, we must keep the condition of the Israelites under King Jeroboam II. before our eyes ; and the legend of the Transfiguration on the mount cannot be explained until we are at home in the disputes of the apostolical community on points of doctrine.

It would be very troublesome to us, however, and not a little wearisome to you, if every time we took up a legend we were compelled by anticipation to transport ourselves to an entirely different condition of things from that described in the narratives which precede and follow ; if, to confine ourselves to the same examples, while in the middle of our

treatment of the Mosaic age, we had to describe the century of Jeroboam II., or in the midst of the details of the life of Jesus to speak of the factions of the first century which followed him. But yet we must not treat such a legend carelessly; it must be explained in every point as thoroughly as possible. The way in which we have attempted to meet these difficulties is as follows:—

In the first place, we have prefixed a review of the history of Israel to our treatment of the narratives of the Old Testament—a sketch of the history of Jesus and the Apostolic age to those of the New. In this we have been as brief as possible; but in the sequel of our work we suppose you to be acquainted with the principal features of the history. You must look upon these introductions, therefore, as the rapid sketch in outline of the drawings which will be worked up afterwards when we come to treat of the separate narratives.

In the second place, we shall transpose some few of our narratives, those, namely, which would compel us to make wide digressions if we took them up in the connection in which they are found in the Bible, but which are particularly valuable in throwing light upon the age to which they really belong. Thus, you would look in vain for the blessing of Balaam in the Mosaic age, but the narrative will find its place in the eighth century; and that of the Transfiguration will be considered when we are dealing with the Apostolic age, but not in the life of Jesus.

III.

Without intending it, we have enlarged a good deal on the unhistorical character of many of the Biblical narratives, and the influence which it has had upon the arrangement of our work. It really was a matter which could not be

settled in a couple of lines. But it is possible that we may have led one or two of our readers into the mistake of supposing that it is the essential point in our eyes.

This is by no means the case, however. As we said just now, our greatest care has been to make these narratives speak to the heart and conscience, and in explaining them to offer wholesome and pleasant food to the religious and moral sense. It is our heart-felt wish that they may do our readers good, bring God nearer to them, and lead them to the knowledge of the highest truth.

Now, if anyone thinks that these narratives can hardly serve such a purpose, because, after all, they are to a great extent, "mere" legends, he is under a mistake. When we ask, What took place? then, of course, a legend has much less value than an accurate account drawn up by an eye-witness, or at least a trustworthy contemporary; and for many a period of the history both of Israel and of Jesus and his apostles, we have to lament the absence of reliable accounts. But it is quite another matter if we use a narrative as a means of nourishing our religious and moral life. In this case its value depends entirely upon the spiritual stand-point of the composers, who lay before us in this symbolic form of expression their aims and opinions, their hope and fear, their love and their hate, their struggle after clearer light, their faith and their doubt. Now, the legends of the Old and New Testaments are the work of the Israelites and Christians, and may therefore serve in an eminent degree to enlarge our horizon, to purify our feelings, to enrich and strengthen our inner life. For the Israelites stand before all the nations of antiquity in their grasp of religious subjects, so that Israel is rightly called the people of religion. And if even they, who only walked in the twilight, and so had very imperfect, nay, often very perverted ideas of God and their own vocation, deserve a hearing,

how much more instructive and refreshing must it be to share the thoughts and feelings of the disciples of Jesus, by whom so much light has been thrown upon the problems of the inner life !

But——what is it that we keep saying about the inner life ? Reader ! do you quite understand us ? As we formed and settled our plan, as we spoke together about the contents of our narratives before beginning to carry it out, the fear crept over us from time to time that we might not be altogether understood by “young people.” Are we running no risk, we asked each other, of rising too high or plunging too deep ? The danger threatens us from more sides than one. It is true we do not imagine our readers to be children—to understand the Bible is anything but child’s work !—but young people who have already completed their early education, and from whom we may therefore expect a certain amount of general information. But in dealing with the Biblical narratives so much has to be taken into account ! May we not, without intending it, pre-suppose more knowledge on the part of our readers than they possess ; greater familiarity with different branches of science, for example, with history and geography, with the disposition of society and the life of nature ? We will try to escape this danger, and shall rather insert a remark or explanation which may be superfluous to some, than run the risk of being misunderstood. But for all that, it is still possible that everything will not be clear to you at first, and that you will only enter by degrees into some parts of our work. In one respect—and it is specially to this that we wish to call your attention now—it will certainly be the case. You will not understand at first what we have to say to you of *the inner life of man*. This inner life is the experience of man, considered as a spiritual being :—all his inward consciousness of God and feeling towards him. Now, though you have a life

within already, yet its development cannot be either high or varied till you are older. As our experience of life increases, if we keep in the right way—that is to say, if we not only grow older, but braver and more earnest, wiser and better too—then our spiritual life is always growing richer. For you it is impossible as yet to sound the depths of the sense of guilt, or to climb to the joyous heights of the feeling of forgiveness and redemption; and yet without more or less experience of all this it is impossible to understand the Bible—even to grasp the true meaning and comprehend the full value of many of its narratives.

But what are we to do? Are we not to catch up and give out again those sounds of gloom and heaviness of heart: “O God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” and “Where is an offering for my transgression?” or to interpret the prophetic word, “The Lord hath spoken to me?” Are we to stifle the expectant cry, “The kingdom of God is coming!” and leave unuttered that glad sound, “Redemption and eternal life!” because all this can only find an imperfect echo in the hearts of young people? To do so would be to renounce the holiest truths! No! Whenever we tread the ground of religion and morality under the guidance of the Biblical writers we shall endeavour (of course under the simplest possible forms) to work out the deep and lofty truths of the spiritual life without reserve, even at the risk of being only half understood at first by many of our readers. Though these impressions and emotions may still be partial mysteries to them at their present time of life, they will surely suffer no harm from a moment’s reverent contemplation of them.

Hereafter you will understand all this far better, unless the world engross your souls. God grant it may not,—but the danger is great. For our age makes great demands upon young people. Far more knowledge of the world, and a far more varied scientific education is expected now than for-

merly, life is more restless than ever, and the necessity of earning a livelihood, together with the natural wish to get on in the world, put an almost irresistible pressure upon us, which is always urging us forward. As the demands of society become more urgent and more numerous, the facilities for acquiring a wide and varied education are constantly multiplied. Who would not rejoice in this? But amidst it all the heart is still cold and poverty-stricken. Some counteracting power must be found, for we men have a pressing need of godliness, and the pulse of our spiritual life must beat strong. The great questions, "What am I in the world for? where am I going to? what does duty lay down for me to do or leave undone? how am I to be made what I can and must be made—truly good and truly happy?"—these questions must emphatically be asked, and each one must earnestly seek the answers to them for himself; or else we shall sooner or later find ourselves unhappy in spite of wealth or sensual enjoyment, nay, in spite of all knowledge and external culture.

We must make ourselves good and pure, and it is no easy task! Nay, even if we strain all our own powers to the utmost it is not enough, unless we take advantage of all the help that lies within our reach as well. There are, no doubt, some men who would make young people believe that in matters of religion and morality they can manage for themselves and want no guides, that a man can really always do right if only he choose, and more idle talk to the same effect. Anyone who says such things betrays his own deep ignorance. It is so terribly hard for us to become men whom the world has cause to value, who can retain their own self-respect, and on whom God can look down with pleasure, that our own strength is insufficient for the task. We must have strong help from without us. Unless our moral and religious sense is surrounded by good

influences it becomes more and more weak and impure. Unless our spiritual life is steadily nourished we become famished in the end. If we have no guides in spiritual things we are sure to go astray.

The Bible is one of the most precious means of help in all these things. We hope to teach you to value it. The Bible, as the book of religion, is a treasure-house of truths, and bears witness to a nobler guide than any other you can find—to Jesus.

May the Bible, as it speaks to you of God, quicken your sight and open your heart to see Him in our time and in our life.

And God give you strength for the hard task of life which lies before you !

PART I.

THE NARRATIVES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

INTRODUCTION.

SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL.

I.

ABOUT the year 1320 before Christ, certain shepherd tribes threw off the yoke of slavery, under which they had long been crushed in Egypt, and spread themselves with their flocks over the peninsula of Sinai. They knew by tradition that their forefathers, together with other tribes, had come from the heart of Asia, from beyond the Euphrates, whence they derived their name of Hebrews—that is, men from the other side—and that they had wandered about for some time in the land of Canaan, before they had taken up their abode in Egypt.

Besides community of interest, the principal clans amongst them were bound together by common descent and similarity of customs and religion. Some of these families—the heart of the tribes of which we are speaking—called themselves “the sons of Israel.”

The manners of these Hebrews were rude. In religious as well as in social matters, they stood as yet upon a very low level. Of an intimate national union, of civil government, of legislation there was not a trace. Their religion was a motley polytheism. They believed in sacred stones and trees, and worshipped the powers of nature. They were disposed to look upon these powers under their forbidding aspects, as hostile to mankind, and under the names of

“God Almighty” (El Shaddai), “the Lord” (Baal or Adon), “the Dreaded One” (Elohim), “the Strong One” (El), “the King” (Molech); they worshipped gods whose character is most clearly expressed by the symbol of a consuming fire. Bloody sacrifices, too, were the chief part of their worship, circumcision was practised, and even human sacrifices were not unusual. Besides this, the seventh day of the week, and the day of the new moon, were observed as sacred. But, of course, no complete similarity of usages and opinions existed among these hordes. On the contrary, the differences among them were very considerable.

At the head of these tribes stood Moses, of the clan of Levi, whose name they had good reason to immortalise. Not only was he the soul of their confederacy in Egypt, but he also laid the foundation of their future national unity, by strengthening the connection between the tribes. This he accomplished, chiefly, by introducing the worship of Yahweh as Israel’s god, and by giving out, as a fundamental code of laws, the so-called “Ten Commandments.”

The name Yahweh is probably unknown to most of my readers. Jehovah has hitherto been used instead. But for some time past the conviction has become general that the name which Israel used for its god must not be so pronounced. Nor does “Jehovah” appear for the most part in the translations of the Bible. In the Authorised Version we almost always read “the LORD” instead of it.¹ For some time past the incorrect form of the name has been superseded by a better one in more or less technical works. Why should not we, too, follow their lead? It certainly looks rather strange, but we must some time give up the use of an incorrect form, and we soon get accustomed to an

¹ “Jehovah” only occurs by itself four times in the Authorised Version. The most important case is that of Exodus vi. 3. It is also found five times in proper names, as in Genesis xxii. 14.

unusual orthography. We shall therefore write it—Yahweh. It is not easy for us Europeans to pronounce the name as an Israelite did, for in our language we never pronounce an *h* at the close of a syllable. The last vowel (on which the accent falls) must be pronounced like the *e* in “wet.” What this name means, and where Moses got it from, we shall inquire further on.

The “Ten Commandments” probably ran as follows:—
I, Yahweh, am your god. Worship no other gods beside me. Make no image of a god. Commit no perjury. Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day. Honour your father and your mother. Commit no murder. Break not the marriage vow. Steal not. Bear no false witness. Covet not.

The great value of this fundamental code lies, in the first place, in the fact that by forbidding every other religion, it paved the way to the recognition of the unity of God, and, secondly, in the close connection which it established between religion and morality. What else Moses did for his tribesmen is unknown. The principal sacred object of his time appears to have been the ark, near which, or in which, it was thought that Yahweh lived.

For half a century, or more, these Hebrew tribes led the life of wandering shepherds in the Arabian desert. This name included not only the wilderness bordering on Egypt, but also the great steppes which lie between the Jordan and Mount Seir on the one side, and the Euphrates on the other. At the end of this period, assisted by the peoples of Moab and Ammon, who were related to them, they made themselves masters of the district east of the Jordan, and gradually pushed into Canaan, supported by Midianite and Edomite tribes, partly from the southern, but chiefly from the eastern side; and there they won themselves a home after a desperate struggle, under the leadership of Joshua, of the tribe of Ephraim.

II.

During the first two centuries of the residence of the Israelites in Canaan, their history presents a scene of great confusion. National union can hardly be spoken of. It is true that the different clans which belonged to the same tribe were conscious of their relationship to each other; true, too, that the various tribes recognised more or less distinctly a mutual tie; but this feeling was not strong enough to make them stand by each other always. Yet there was pressing need of this mutual support, since their independence was anything but secured. For, although the Canaanite tribes had been expelled, rooted out, or subjected, some of them gradually recovered strength, and gave the invaders a great deal of trouble, compelling them to treat with them, not always on very honourable terms, and in some places even making them pay tribute. Besides this, the Philistines, a warlike people, not of Canaanite race, who held possession of the southern coast, kept their neighbours, the tribes of Dan and Judah, fully employed, while other surrounding peoples—as the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites—took advantage of the feeble condition of the new inhabitants of Canaan to oppress them; and even marauding shepherd tribes, from time to time, poured over the country. Yet the mutual jealousy of the Israelite clans was such that they not only often left each other to their fate, but sometimes even fought against one another; and there was a special want of goodwill between the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh in the north and Judah in the south.

So it often seemed as if “the sons of Israel” would melt away amongst other peoples, and never gain an independent national existence. But a mighty power was slumbering in these tribes, and whenever their need was sorest this power was awakened by heroes, who called the tribes to

battle in the name of Yahweh, succeeded in uniting several connected clans under their banner, and preserved the hard-pressed people from destruction. After their victory they generally continued to rule the people, or at least the tribe, which they had rescued ; and since they bore the name of " Judges " as supreme chiefs, the centuries in which their deeds were performed are generally called the Period of the Judges.

It became clear, however, that the independence of the Israelites was not permanently insured by the rise of these judges, and that the tribes could never become a united nation on the strength of religious revivals and the personal authority of the men who offered themselves as leaders. Samuel was the last to make the attempt, and in spite of all his efforts the Philistines on the one side, and the Ammonites on the other, would have entirely subdued the " sons of Israel " had not the latter made up their minds to adopt the regal form of government. No doubt it cost them a great struggle to bend their proud necks beneath the yoke of an absolute ruler, but they were driven to it by necessity.

During the two centuries in which the wandering, loosely-connected shepherd tribes had grown into a nation cultivating the soil and governed by a king, they had unavoidably mingled to a great extent, in many districts, with the Canaanites, who were nearly related to them and spoke the same language. They had much to learn from them, for the Canaanites were skilled in various arts and sciences ; but contact with them was extremely dangerous to the worship of Yahweh. For the religion of the Canaanites had many points of similarity with the primitive religion of the Israelites. The worship of the Baals occupied an important place in it, and the licentious rites which were often performed in honour of the powers of nature had deeply corrupted the manners of the Canaanites.

In various places the Israelites were sadly polluted by intercourse with the Canaanites ; but in general the worship of Yahweh, according to Mosaic principles, triumphed. The chief sanctuary of the country, that of Shiloh, was consecrated to him ; and from time to time the offended dignity of Yahweh was maintained, often after a very bloody fashion, and a rough penal code carried out against apostates. And yet, though Yahweh was always the chief god, all kinds of Baals were worshipped by his side, even by zealous contenders for his honour.

~~Sed~~ In matters of religion the widest freedom ruled. Temples and altars stood everywhere. There was no definite priesthood to whom sacrificial and expiatory rites and the consultation of the deity were entrusted. The priests who were attached to the great sanctuaries, such as those of Dan, of Shiloh, of Bethel, and of Beersheba, had a great deal of influence, and the members of the tribe of Moses (the Levites) were often preferred to others for the office of priest, if they could be got.

Saul, of the tribe of Benjamin, was the first acknowledged king of all the "sons of Israel." His reign was short, but not inglorious. He waged successful wars ; and also appeared as a powerful and zealous defender of Yahweh's honour. But he was unable to keep himself upon the throne, for he had a quarrel with Samuel, and this seems to have impaired his power to such an extent that he was no longer a match for the Philistines, and after his death his son Ishbosheth retained nothing but a shadow of power. Through the influence of the party of Samuel, David the son of Jesse was now proclaimed king by the tribe of Judah (about 1058). After two years of civil war, Ishbosheth fell, and the strong hand of David grasped the reins of government over all the tribes.

III.

Samuel had left his people an institution out of which a formidable political power was afterwards developed, namely, the schools of the prophets. Prophets were men who, fired with enthusiasm, spoke as if inspired by some deity; and Samuel drew young men of this character together in schools, and kindled their enthusiasm by music and other means, and at the same time gave them such a training that they came forward in the name of Yahweh as advisers and as guides of the people, with ever-increasing boldness. The people, full of reverence for the men of God, lent them a willing ear, and their influence, therefore, was very great. David was their friend, and that of the priests as well. He began his reign by the conquest of Jerusalem, which up to this time had been in the hands of the Canaanites. He then removed the ark to the same city, and took up his own abode there. Thus, he made his capital the central point of the religious life of Israel, and so bound up his own interests and honour with those of Yahweh. His ideas about this god, and the way in which he was to be worshipped, were, however, very imperfect and rude. He, too, invoked the Baals, and sometimes made frightful offerings to avert the wrath of Yahweh. Though music and poetry were cultivated with success in his days, and even by him personally, yet it is a great mistake to suppose him the author of most of the Psalms.

In consequence of a number of successful wars, David, in spite of repeated internal disasters, left Israel as a powerful kingdom to his son Solomon (about 1018), who succeeded, though not without difficulty, in holding it together. His reign was very brilliant. He kept a dazzling court, and his costly palaces, the magnificent temple which he built for Yahweh at Jerusalem, and the commerce in which he engaged

spread his fame far and wide. And as the Israelites from this time forward came into closer contact with a number of foreign nations, their horizon also was enlarged. Solomon himself is called the father of wisdom—that is, of the art of making proverbs and setting riddles—and from his time forward the “wise men” are a recognised power in the development of the national character.

But however brilliant, the reign of Solomon brought no happiness to his people. The cost of all this splendour was heavy, and the taxes were therefore oppressive. This fed the ancient jealousy of the northern tribes against Judah to no small degree. The prophets, too, were very far from content. Indeed, Solomon had not only set up a sanctuary for Yahweh, but had done the same for the gods of other countries too, and he troubled himself very little about the exclusive rights of the god of Israel, while even the temple itself, in the eyes of many, bore, with good reason, a decidedly heathenish character.

Meanwhile, by the erection of the temple at Jerusalem, Solomon had laid the foundation of the power of the priests who did duty there; for though there were hundreds of sanctuaries in the land, though no one thought as yet of limiting their number, much less of contesting the legality of the worship on the “high places,” yet it stands to reason that the magnificent sanctuary, made illustrious by the royal presence, attracted a host of pilgrims, and gradually became the central point of the worship of Yahweh. It is therefore of importance to remark that there was no image of Yahweh in the temple, and that the most prominent of the priests who were attached to the sanctuary were of the tribe of Levi. At their head stood Zadok.

After Solomon's death, the fire that had so long been smouldering burst out, and most of the tribes revolted from his son Rehoboam. Only Judah, with that part of Benjamin

in which Jerusalem lay, remained faithful to the house of David, while Jeroboam of Ephraim became king of the northern realm, which is called the kingdom of the ten tribes, or of Israel (978 B.C.).

IV.

The northern kingdom was much larger than Judah, and when it came to a war between the two Judah had generally to give way before Israel; but while the Judæans were always very faithful to the family of David, in the northern kingdom one royal house kept following another, and the constantly recurring wars with the Syrians were a great cause of weakness. In the form of their Yahweh-worship the two kingdoms were opposed to each other to a certain extent from the beginning, for Jeroboam I., in opposition to the worship of Yahweh without an image in the temple of Jerusalem, encouraged the adoration of this god under the form of a steer, and, for instance, set up images of this description in the great sanctuaries at Dan and Bethel. This gave great offence to many of his subjects; amongst others, to some of the prophets, by whose influence, to some extent, he had gained his throne; and to various Levites who did duty at different sanctuaries. Some of them even left the country in consequence of it. But the question whether the image-worship was allowable or not soon fell into the background, when, under the reign of Ahab, the worship of the Syrian god Baal gained ground amongst the people to such an extent that Yahweh was in danger of being pushed aside. This roused the utmost efforts of the prophets, whose activity has been recorded by tradition under the representative names of Elijah and Elisha. By their efforts Baal was defeated, and Jehu, who was placed on the throne by them, restored the worship of Yahweh to its former honour (884).

In Judah, too, the same battle raged, though not so fiercely, when King Jehoshaphat had allied his house with that of Ahab; especially when Athaliah, the daughter of the latter, had gained possession of the throne; but here the contest was soon decided in favour of Yahweh. The priests of the temple of Jerusalem played a more important part in this affair than the prophets, and, indeed, these last had by no means formed so active a political-religious party in Judah as they had in Israel.

In consequence of the victory of the Yahweh-worship over that of Baal, the conception of Yahweh's being became more and more exalted. If he had hitherto been a god standing by the side of others, he became henceforth for the guiding spirits among the Israelites the god of gods, who had chosen Israel as his people, and established an eternal covenant with them. At the same time, the moral demands of Yahweh were brought more into the foreground. This exalted conception, however, was the portion of but few. The mass of the people was far from embracing it, and even most of the members of the prophetic schools did not rise much above the common notions of their day, and were more like soothsayers than "spiritual men."

V.

The kings of Jehu's house (from 884 to 770) were in many respects admirable princes. Under Jeroboam II., indeed, Israel realised a prosperity it had never known before, and even after the fall of this dynasty some of Israel's rulers swayed the sceptre not without glory. But like so many greater kingdoms, Israel was unable to resist the formidable power of the Assyrians, who subdued first one province and then another, until at last, in the year 719, under King Shalmanezzer, they took Samaria, the capital of Israel, and carried off the cream of the nation into captivity.

Judah, whose king, Ahaz, had called in the help of the Assyrians against Israel, was in consequence reduced to a position of dependence upon them; but Hezekiah again refused to obey them, and though the kingdom was thereby brought into great danger, yet Sennacherib was foiled in his machinations against Jerusalem.

At this period (the eighth century) there lived a number of prophets, whose words have been preserved to us in writing, so that we are able to make out from them what were the ideas of the most highly developed Israelites of those days. They are:—Amos, Hosea, The writer of Zachariah, ix.—xi., Isaiah, and Michah. According to their conviction, Yahweh is the lord of hosts, the inaccessible and holy, who rewards every man righteously according to his works, and whose spirit rules over all things, both the kingdom of nature and the mind of man. These prophets do not exactly deny the existence of other gods (whom they generally identify with their images), and though their Yahweh is too exalted to allow of other deities by his side, yet they themselves can hardly have been clearly conscious that they really recognised only one god. In spite of Yahweh's greatness, the mount of the temple, Sion, is still called his dwelling place, and Israel is the only people with whom he has made a covenant, so that Canaan is also called "the holy land." These prophets knew or recognised no written law of Yahweh. Their god revealed his will through his servants the prophets. They did not show much reverence for outward adoration, sacrifices, fasts, and the like, and they always insisted on repentance and good deeds.

These prophets often came before the people and the king as advisers in affairs of state. In this respect they occupied a peculiar position of their own, for their belief in the omnipotence of the righteous and exalted god of Israel led them to declare that every alliance with a foreign nation ought

to be rejected, that no yoke of a heathen oppressor was to be borne, and that the people must rest upon Yahweh's help alone, so that even preparations for war were a proof of want of faith.

As to the future, their conviction of the nation's sins led them to expect retribution from Yahweh's justice ; but their faith in Israel's election and destiny inspired them with the hope of the restoration of the glory of the people of God, while they often looked back upon the time of King David as upon a golden age. For the most part, they expected the salvation of the people at the hands of a righteous prince of the house of David, and comforted themselves and others with the hope of his ascending the throne. This is called "the Messianic expectation." These prospects were all the more absorbing to the Israelites, inasmuch as the belief in man's personal immortality was altogether unknown to them.

But although these prophets, both by their words and their writings, exercised a great influence over the people, yet they and their followers formed but a small minority. Over against them stood the mass of the people, whose representatives were vigorous upholders of the worship of other gods beside Yahweh, of image-worship, and of many heathen practices. Indeed, under Ahaz, through the influence of the Assyrians, there was actually a religious revival amongst the members of this heathen party, as we may call it, which showed itself in the building of Tophet, near Jerusalem, for the use of those who wanted to sacrifice their children to Molech, and in the spread of star-worship and the astrology connected with it. This movement was so powerful that even the worship in the temple of Jerusalem was modified by it.

The prophets, then, whose names we mentioned above, led the party of progress. Up to a certain point they

were supported by the Levitical priests of Jerusalem, as well as by the "wise men," who were indeed distinctly at one with them, though they do not seem to have taken any decided practical action.

Hezekiah was the first prince who was guided in his conduct of the government by the prophets of what may be called the Mosaic school. He attempted not only to root out the worship of strange gods, but also to confine that of Yahweh to Jerusalem. With this view, he destroyed a number of sanctuaries of Yahweh, to the great indignation of many of his subjects. Besides all this he threw off the yoke of Assyria, and was very near bringing his people to destruction by so doing.

After his death the heathen party once more got possession of the helm of state, and raged under Manasseh and Amon against the upholders of the exclusive worship of Yahweh for more than half a century. But under oppression the latter had grown in numbers and in power. The prophets and the Levitical priests now pulled together. They made a clear statement of their demands in the Book of Deuteronomy; and in the eighteenth year of King Josiah's reign (626) the religion of the country was violently reformed, as far as possible in accordance with their views. Henceforth no other worship was to be allowed than that of Yahweh in the temple of Jerusalem, where none but Levitical priests did duty.

As Assyria was now much weakened, Josiah was enabled to bring the northern provinces—at any rate, partially—under his power, and to regulate the exercise of religion there too, in accordance with his own ideas.

VI.

The reformation of Josiah is a turning point in the history of Israel, for the religious tendencies which have ever

since distinguished the Jewish people then first gained the ascendant. But at the same time it caused, or at any rate hastened, the fall of the kingdom. For by the triumph of this party, the prophets who declared in the name of Yahweh's righteousness that his faithful people was invincible, acquired great influence, and carried princes and people with them. Josiah himself fell in a war in which he had rashly involved himself against the Egyptian king, Necho; and when Necho in his turn was conquered by the Chaldees, Judah became the prey of this powerful people, and their king, Nebucadresar, finally laid waste the city and the temple, and carried off the cream of the people into captivity (586).

This blow, and the misery that followed it, gave the greatest weight to the words of a Jeremiah and an Ezekiel, who, one in Judæa and the other in the land of captivity, had ascribed Israel's humiliation to the sins of the people, for which Yahweh, the only true god, was punishing them. Soon after the beginning of the captivity, the whole history of Israel was worked up, from this point of view, by a Judæan, whose history we still possess in the books of Judges, Samuel, and Kings. The principles of Deuteronomy, moreover, were strongly impressed upon the people by the captivity, and the belief in Israel's election, together with the hope of a return, still lived in the hearts of many. Hence, when Cyrus, the king of the Persians, gradually subdued the provinces of the kingdom of the Chaldees, he was hailed with the utmost joy, as the instrument in Yahweh's hand for the chastisement of his enemies and the deliverance of his people. Yahweh's glory accordingly rose higher and higher in their eyes; and when Cyrus gave them leave to return to their fatherland, thousands of them availed themselves of his permission under the guidance of the governor, Zerubbabel, and the high-priest, Joshua, trusting that through the might

of Yahweh, who had foretold all that had happened by his prophets, they were now about to establish the Messianic kingdom (538).

To this expectation, however, the event by no means answered, for the Judæans, harassed by their neighbours (especially by the Samaritans), giving offence on every side by their national pride, sometimes, too, suspected by their Persian rulers, could only just manage to build and to preserve their temple and their city walls. Independence was not to be thought of; and when the Persian empire fell, their country passed over, without a blow or a struggle, into the hands of Alexander the Great (332).

During these two centuries, though no great change took place in the outer lot of the people, their religion in many respects underwent great alterations, and the work was vigorously carried forward on the basis of Josiah's reformation. But while the Judæans who returned with Zerubbabel had to wrestle with a host of difficulties in finding the means of livelihood, in defending themselves against their enemies, and in rebuilding their temple, there still lived in Babylonia many thousands of their brothers in the faith, whose interest in their people, their fatherland, and the temple had not died away, and who were earnestly attached to the service of Yahweh. Amongst them a priestly tendency gained ground, which had already found a powerful exponent in Ezekiel. During the eighty years which followed the permission to return, the disciples of this school had reduced to writing a number of laws relating to the distinction between clean and unclean, the celebration of the Sabbath and other feasts, the different kinds of sacrifices, the dignity of rank among the priests, the arrangement of the sanctuary, and so on; and Ezra, who came to Jerusalem in 458, brought these laws into operation, with the assistance of the governor, Nehemiah, though not without much opposition. The supre-

macy of the Law among the Jews dates from this moment. Those who were opposed to this legal tendency, and would not consent to the limitations imposed by the Law upon their freedom, found a place of refuge with the Samaritans and elsewhere, and a central point for their worship in the temple on Mount Gerizim.

In a certain sense the longings of the great prophets before the captivity were accomplished by the introduction of this law. Its object was certainly to make Israel a people sanctified to Yahweh. But in many respects what was now realised was something altogether different from what the bold champions of the Mosaic tendency before Josiah had intended. The very law itself, which became supreme among the Jews, under the name of "the Mosaic law," was in some points of heathen origin. Different usages of the old worshippers on "the high places," elements of the popular religion, were incorporated in the laws, while the priests who drew them up did not stand so high above the religion of the people as did men like Michah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel. And, moreover, religious liberty was now, once for all, relinquished. Prophetic independence was not to be tolerated. The distance from Yahweh at which each one was placed at his birth was accurately defined by the Law. According to it the children of Israel had indeed a more liberal portion in the holiness of Yahweh than the heathen had. Yet nearer to him stood the tribe of Levi, amongst whom the "sons of Aaron" rose pre-eminent as priests, and at their head again the high priest stood as the holiest of all mankind. This arrangement of the priestly ranks is very characteristic of the sanctity demanded by the Law. Everything it required was precisely defined. Thus as the Law was introduced, prophecy at the same time died out. The Written Word took the place of the immediate revelation of Yahweh to his servants the prophets. The prophets were succeeded by the Scribes.

VII.

From Ezra's reformation onward the scribes exercised a decisive influence over Israel's religion, and also, to a certain extent, over the fate of the people. By their teaching, which they mostly gave in the synagogues, they impressed the Law upon the Jews, and at the same time elaborated what they called "the Tradition," and applied it to varying circumstances of life. The Jews who had stayed behind in Babylonia now came into frequent contact with the Persians, and as some of them had kept up close and continuous communications with their brethren in Palestine, more than one idea insensibly passed into the Jewish religion from that of the Persians, which resembled it in many points.

The people sympathised deeply with the scribes and their work; felt as much respect for them as for the priests, often even more; and vied with each other in glorifying the temple of Jerusalem and the law of the Lord. We still have the most beautiful examples of this in the book of Psalms, which, although older poems have found a place in it, is as a whole the hymn book of the second temple. Religion became more and more the special characteristic of the Jews and the great mainspring of their policy. The supreme power in the country of the Jews—subject, of course, to the Persian governor—was lodged with the high priest, by whose side we soon find a council established, which is generally called by a Greek name "the Sanhedrim."

The incorporation of their territory into the empire of Alexander the Great exercised a powerful influence upon the Jews. A new world was opened to them by this event—the world of the genius of Greece. During the century and a half in which Judæa was the bone of contention between the Kings of Egypt, the Lagidæ, and those of Syria, the Seleucidæ—now subject to the former and now to the

latter—it remained continually exposed to the influence of Greek science, art, and culture; so that it became a question whether the Greek would overpower the peculiar Jewish spirit, or whether the Jews would preserve the characteristics which distinguished them from other peoples.

While the Greek influence was making itself felt, the scribes and priests still continued their work. The former applied themselves to the development of the Law, the latter to that of the ritual. With reference to the efforts of the priests, the books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah are especially noteworthy; for we see from them how they looked at the history of the people from their own point of view, and the means they took to give a priestly tinge to the past. Meanwhile the directions taken by the activity of the scribes, and by that of the priests, departed more and more widely from each other, until the attempt of Antiochus Epiphanes to root out the Jewish religion (167) roused all those who were attached to the customs of their forefathers to exert their powers to the utmost to prevent the absorption of the people of Yahweh into the nations, and the loss of its special character. The struggle was short but fierce. Mattathias and his sons, generally called the Hasmonæans or the Maccabees, stood at the head of the “devout,” who fought successfully for the freedom of their country (138). In the midst of this mighty effort of the faithful servants of Yahweh, the Messianic expectations, which had for some time been pushed quite into the background, experienced a powerful revival. The book of Daniel gives us a clear insight into the beliefs that inspired the Jews in this contest, and into their desires for the future.

The event, however, did not answer to the high-wrought expectations of this book. The Hasmonæans did indeed govern the land for some time as kings and high priests at the same time, and one of them, John Hyrcanus, conquered

his neighbours, the Galilæans, Samaritans, and others, and even compelled the Idumæans to embrace Judaism; but after his death (106) his house was ruined by internal divisions, and in the year 37 the Idumæan (Edomite) Herod made himself master of the throne by the help of the Romans.

All was now over with the prosperity and internal peace of the people. A Jewish state did indeed exist for another century, but whether a prince of the house of Herod was nominally at its head, or whether the Roman governors exercised their power immediately, the Romans were always masters of the country, and the strength of the most fiery champions of Israel's liberty was wasted in hopeless struggles against their power, until in the year 70 after Christ Jerusalem was taken and destroyed by Titus. This was the end of the Jewish state. The tumultuous risings which afterwards took place were speedily, though not always easily, suppressed. As a Jewish city, Jerusalem was never rebuilt.

But Judaism was not annihilated by this. Since the Babylonian captivity Palestine had indeed been the central point of the Jews, and the temple of Jerusalem their great sanctuary, but even in the midst of foreign nations many thousands of them had preserved their peculiar national character, together with a passionate interest in their religion and their people. In Babylonia and Egypt especially there were flourishing Jewish communities which even exercised some influence on the religious development in Palestine. Now that Jerusalem had fallen, it appeared that Judaism could still exist, even without a political centre. The scribes—sometimes in peace, sometimes under persecution—continued to build upon the foundations laid by the fathers. Numerous schools of these learned men watched faithfully over the preservation of the

Holy Scripture, and worked zealously at the more accurate definition of the Law. The results of their labours are registered to a large extent in the Talmud. So the influence of the scribes has preserved Judaism from destruction down to our day; but has too often resolved the religious life of the Jews into the frivolous observance of hundreds of religious usages.

VIII.

In a few pages we have run through a period of fourteen centuries. It has been a gallop through, and nothing more, just to get a general view of the whole. We shall now take different groups from this great field under closer inspection; and then a great deal that has seemed obscure in this sketch will become clearer and will spring into life before us. Just in the same way we have a general but rather hazy recollection of the character of a country through which we have passed in an express train; but only those scenes live in our memory, and make a strong individual impression upon us, in which we have lingered long enough to observe all their details.

The long history, of which we have taken a hurried survey, leaves a mournful impression at its close. It is true that we have watched Israel issuing from the night of superstition and immorality, and have seen how the light arose to some extent upon the people; but we have to close by dwelling upon the fact that this light was in a great measure quenched again, and that the efforts of the noblest of Israel's sons could not prevent the Law from stifling to a great extent the freedom of the spirit.

A sad result in truth!

But about half a century before the fall of Jerusalem, in the former territory of the ten tribes, there rose a man in whom the spirit of the greatest prophets and the devoutest

psalmists lived again, in whom all that had been true and beautiful in the religion of Israel was restored and purified. Jesus of Nazareth wakened a new life. But although he sprang from Isarel, his creation in the spiritual world belongs no more to the history of the Israelite religion, but forms the material of a new one.

Although in Israel, then, the light goes down, in Jesus of Nazareth it rises with fresh glory.

BOOK I.

THE GENERATIONS BEFORE MOSES.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST ACCOUNT OF THE CREATION.

GEN. I. 1—II. 3.

SOMETIMES it happens that a child, not more than a few years old, perhaps, gazing out of the window at the trees and flowers or over the snow-covered fields, or looking up at the kindly moon and the twinkling stars, asks all at once : Why, mother, wherever does the world come from ? The child's question is often asked by grown-up people too. We know that everything we see around us comes into existence in the natural course of things—that animals are born, and plants grow up from seeds ; and children at school are taught much more about the laws of life and nature now-a-days than formerly ; but this is not enough to satisfy us. We want to understand how things began as well as how they go on ; and the questions : Where did the first egg from which a bird was hatched come from ? Where did the first grain of seed that grew into a fruit-bearing plant come from ? Where did the sun, that inexhaustible fountain of warmth, come from ? What was the beginning of everything that exists ?—such questions as these are always rising in the minds of men who take any interest in what they see, or reflect at all about it.

Now, the learned men who study geology and astronomy are seeking the answers to these questions to the best of their power; and, thanks to their industry, they are getting on from step to step. That is to say, though the questions which have the greatest interest for us—how was the matter formed out of which everything is made? and, how did the principle of life in plant, animal, or man, itself come into existence?—still remain unanswered; yet the condition of the earth many centuries before human beings lived on it is revealed; the great changes which its surface and the various races of its inhabitants have undergone in the course of time are brought more and more to light; the laws of nature, by which our solar system is held together and kept in motion, are explained; and the size, the weight, and the distance from each other, of many of the heavenly bodies are calculated. But the further a man advances in the knowledge of nature, the more frankly does he admit that he knows comparatively little, and that there is much that he would gladly understand—such as the origin of things, for example—to which he cannot penetrate. Science is modest.

There is, however, another faculty which may be used to answer difficult questions, such as how the world was formed and came into existence, and that is the imagination, which rests a great mass of supposed knowledge upon quite insufficient grounds of observation. The less knowledge a man has, the more freely does he give the rein to his imagination; and, since very little was known in ancient times of the laws of nature and of the construction of the universe, it is not surprising that representations, not only of the history, but of the origin of the world, were produced by the imaginative powers of many different nations. The Greek name “cosmogony” is often given to these representations.

The Israelites, amongst others, did what has just been described; and the Bible begins with a cosmogony. I will

tell you the story, a little expanded to make it clearer, and illustrated by other passages from the writings of the Israelites.

First of all, God made the heaven and the earth, that is, everything that exists. But the world was as yet in utter confusion—a shapeless mass; earth and water were indistinguishable; and though the earth stood fast on its foundations, the water covered everything,¹ so that nothing like trees or animals could exist. Nay, darkness covered all things, and as yet there was no light of heaven. But a power was there to create order out of this confusion or chaos. The breath of God hovered over it.

This state of things was not allowed to last, for God said: Let there be light! and lo! the light was there, and he pronounced it good. Then God gave the light the name of day, while he called the darkness night. So the first day went by.

When it was evening again and the second day had begun, God called a spacious dome into existence to divide into two parts the huge mass of water which made up the greater portion of the chaos. So he made the vault that, firm as a metal mirror,² rears itself high above the earth, and is supported by the mountains.³

Above this vault, which he called heaven, God collected the greater part of the waters which covered the earth; and then he enthroned himself above them, and made them the storehouse of the rain.⁴ So the second day went by.

The work of the second day was continued on the third. Like thunder, God's voice re-echoed over the waters, which still covered everything;⁵ and, lo! they were gathered together into the ocean, which washes the mainland,⁶ and all

¹ Psalm civ. 5, 6. ² Job xxxvii. 18. ³ 2 Sam. xxii. 8. Job xxvi. 11.

⁴ Psalm xxix. 3, 10, civ. 3, 13, cxlviii. 4.

⁵ Psalm civ. 6—8.

⁶ Proverbs viii. 27.

the other seas and water courses, while the mountains rose up and a part of the earth was made dry. At once all kinds of plants came out upon its surface, by the divine command; the grass covered the ground like a green carpet, the herbs sprang up with their means of propagation, the fruit trees with seed-bearing fruit. God saw that it was good.

When the fourth day had broken, glorious new works were made by God. There was light beneath the firmament already, but the heavenly bodies which regulate its coming and going did not exist as yet. God made them. He fixed the sun upon the firmament, and commanded him to give light to the earth by day; he appointed the moon as empress of the night, and then he spangled the vault of heaven with stars. The heavenly bodies were to serve as a distinction between night and day, as well as "for signs," that is, to announce God's judgments by their shining or eclipse, by their unexpected appearance, and by their relations to each other,¹ and for fixing the feast times,² and marking out the months and years. And when the heavens were beautified with these lights, then God pronounced it good.

On the fifth day the waters were peopled with fishes, and the space above the earth with birds. Wondrous sea monsters, serpents, and crocodiles were formed by God, and the waters teemed with fishes and other animals, while the winged creatures hovered in the air and soared up to the canopy above. Divided into many races, they added life to the scene of creation, and God blessed them and made them fruitful, so that they should multiply and fill the earth.

But however good the creations of the fifth day seemed in the eyes of God, the sixth was to crown his work; for on this day he commanded the earth to bring forth the four-footed beasts, both those which were to be man's domestic animals

¹ Jeremiah x. 2. Joel ii. 30, 31.

² Psalm civ. 19.

and the creeping things, and those that live in jungles and deserts, and beasts of prey, and wild game. Many kinds of all these appeared at once. Now the earth was ready to receive her master. Let us make man after our image! said God, speaking in the plural, as kings do; let them be rulers over all that has been made—the fishes, the birds, the four-footed and creeping animals. At his command it was so.

He made mankind—men and women—after his image, and gave them the blessing of fruitfulness, as well as dominion over all the animals. In distinction from the beasts, which had to feed on grass, he gave them grains and herbs and fruits for food. Then God looked upon all his work, and pronounced it good. And so the sixth day ended. The work of creation was finished. Heaven and earth, with all their inhabitants, were made, and God could cease from his creative work.

On the seventh day, therefore, God created nothing more, but rested; and to commemorate this fact he blessed the seventh day of every week and declared it a holy day, consecrated to rest.

There you have one of the Israelite representations of the creation of the world. We shall soon see that it was not the only one; but since the Bible opens with it, it has attracted more attention than the rest, and is even thought sometimes, by those who are imperfectly acquainted with the Bible, to be the only one.

We have many grounds for valuing this legend highly; but we cannot regard it as a faithful description of the formation of the world. It is a great question whether the Israelites themselves accepted it as such. At any rate, this opinion was not held by the compiler of the book of Genesis, who placed, as we shall see in the following chapter, a

second cosmogony, of quite different purport, immediately after this first; nor was any such idea in the mind of the poet who made God ask the censurer of his works :¹

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?
If thou hast the skill, declare!
Who took the measure thereof, if thou knowest,
Or who stretched the line upon it?
Whereon are the columns of her foundation sunk,
Or who laid her corner stone,
When the morning stars rejoiced together
And all the sons of God shouted for joy?

For a long time, however, this cosmogony was regarded as a true history of the creation. But now the number of those who hold this view is always diminishing. And it is only natural that it should be so; for in times past, when people knew but little of the construction of the universe and of the former condition of the earth, they might suppose, in their ignorance, that the first chapter of Genesis gave an account of the real circumstances of the creation; but when the students of astronomy and geology had given an entirely different history of the earth, it was not so easy to accept this biblical account, and the old opinion could not be retained without doing considerable violence to common sense. People have wearied themselves in vain in the effort to reconcile the story which opens the Bible with what the men of science tell us. All kinds of crooked ways to this end have been tried; and that not only in learned books and in dry technical treatises, but in popular works such as Hugh Miller's "Testimony of the Rocks." The more talent this and other such works display, and the more charmingly they are written, the more must we lament that their authors have made all their powers subservient to the hopeless task of reconciling the account of the creation in the first chapter

¹ Job xxxviii. 4--7.

of Genesis with the results of scientific study; for it is impossible to gain even the appearance of success without doing injustice both to the biblical narrative and to the scientific discoveries.

What is the origin of this story of the creation? The celebrated German, J. G. von Herder, has suggested the idea that it is simply the description of awakening nature at the dawn of day, when the darkness of night yields before the morning twilight, making everything gradually distinguishable, while the animals begin to make themselves heard and seen, until at last man comes forth and goes out to his work. This is an ingenious idea, and, as we shall soon see, there is a certain truth at the bottom of it. But the belief that our account of the creation, in the form in which we have it, is a description of the dawn of day, is not correct; for how could anyone, in giving such a description, make the sun, the moon, and the stars come into existence at the same time? The latter vanish out of our sight just when the former rises. The beasts of prey are made after the sun in the narrative; but really they go away and hide themselves as soon as the sun appears; and the Israelites were quite aware of this fact.¹

Our narrative is not a myth, that is to say it is not a figurative description of anything that takes place in nature. Examples of such myths may be found amongst all peoples. Just read, for example, the following account of the creation, which arose among the Chaldees:—Once all was darkness and water; wherein all kinds of monsters lived, over which a woman, Homoroka or Thanath, that is the ocean, held dominion. But the highest God, Bel, divided the darkness and cut the woman into two halves, out of which he formed heaven and earth. Upon this the monsters perished,

¹ Psalm civ. 20–22.

for they could not endure the light. Then Bel cut off his own head, and from the earth, moistened by the drops of blood that fell, he made men, who are therefore endowed with understanding and have a share in the divine reason. This is in all probability a mythical description of the dawn of day. Before the rising of the sun the heavenly ocean rules over the monsters, that is the constellations, but the sun makes these latter vanish of themselves, and forms out of the ruler of the darkness, heaven and earth, since these two can be distinguished from each other as soon as the sunlight chases the night away.

Now, mythical representations such as this were not unknown to the Israelites. They, too, often thought of the heavenly bodies as of living creatures, as will appear from a glance at the passage from Job, quoted above, where the morning stars are placed in the same line with the sons of God, that is the angels. There are also some indications in the first account of the creation that the poet was acquainted with a myth not altogether unlike the Chaldean, though they are so slight as to be altogether lost in a translation. But the account of the creation we are considering is not, as is the case with myths, to a large extent, the product of unbridled imagination. It is indeed highly probable—and that is the truth in Herder's opinion combated above—that the materials of this narrative were furnished by a mythical description of the dawn. But these materials have been worked up by the author into an artistic whole. Probably several features of the old account, those for instance which seemed to the writer unworthy of the deity, fell away from it when it was thus worked up, and certainly one addition was made to it to serve to glorify the day of rest. We shall speak further on of the origin of the custom of celebrating the sabbath; but it is clear that the writer of Gen. i. 1—ii. 3 holds it in great reverence as a holy

day, and endeavours to explain its institution from the fact that God completed the work of creation in six days, and rested on the seventh day, himself.

As a scientific product the narrative has no value; for the writer had only a very defective knowledge of the construction of the universe to go upon. A moderately good school-boy of our days could easily find him out in mistakes. That the earth is a ball which is always turning upon its axis, and at the same time pursuing its rapid course round the sun; that the whole earth, which seems so great to us, is no more, in comparison to the universe, than a single grain of sand on a sea-beach miles in length, and that the sun alone is a million and a half times as large—all this was unknown to the Israelites. For them the earth was a disk, washed round by the ocean, over which the firmament rose like a giant cupola, while sun, moon, and stars moved on the inner surface of this vault.

An Israelite could easily imagine that, in six days of four and twenty hours each, the earth was changed from a chaos into a dwelling place for beasts and men. But now-a-days it does not take much learning to know that many ages elapsed between the time when the firm land gradually appeared and the day upon which a human being first drew breath upon it.

We shall not easily be convinced that the sun and moon announce God's judgments, or that they were made for the purpose of fixing man's reckoning of time. But we must place ourselves at the stand-point of an Israelite who was unacquainted with the causes of many of the phenomena of the heavens, for example of the eclipses of sun and moon, and who regulated his religious feasts principally by the re-appearance of the moon after it had been for a time invisible without his being able to account for its disappearance.

We shall then find nothing unnatural in the rise of such beliefs, although they are altogether beside the truth.

If the value of the first account of the creation is very slight, when looked at from a scientific point of view, as a work of art, on the contrary, it is in the highest degree remarkable. If we compare our cosmogony with that of the Chaldees, which we just now glanced at, how far the latter falls short of it in beauty! The first chapter of Genesis has always been considered a masterpiece, and with good reason too! The tone of the narrative is simple and dignified. There are no extravagant conceptions, such as those of the Chaldee story, and this is certainly not the most grotesque which has been handed down from antiquity. There are no strange representations of the way in which God formed everything. God only speaks, and what he wishes to create exists. "He said: Let there be light! and there was light." That thought is nobly expressed!

The purity of taste with which our writer has composed his narrative bears testimony also to his reverence for God. The strange representations, which we meet elsewhere, did not rise, of course, from contempt for the Deity. The Chaldee saw nothing irreverent in the representation of the god Bel cutting his head off to make the dust into slime with his blood, and thence to shape a human form. It was only his way of expressing his belief that man is related to the Deity. We are in danger of being unfair towards those who express their feelings under forms which do not seem fitting to us. But yet there is something in these symbols which goes against our feelings. We can never speak of God in language dignified enough. Every representation, every description, is defective. And if we cannot keep silence on these matters, but must speak as best we can about Him and what He does, a sacred awe compels us to express our thoughts about God and his work in the simplest language

possible. From this point of view the first biblical account of the creation has a refreshing tone, which raises it above many of the stories and poems even of the Israelites. It seems to cry in our ears : Let honour be rendered to God !

We must not suppose, however, that the conception which the poet had formed of God was free from narrowness. That God rested from his work on the seventh day is an unworthy representation, for God is always working. Moreover, it sounds very strange to say that man was made after God's image. What, we ask, did the writer mean by this ? Did he think of man as like God in soul or in body ? It admits of no doubt that he meant in soul and body both. Of course man's spiritual characteristics, his intellect, his capacity for morality and piety, stood in the foreground of the writer's thoughts when he spoke of his being formed after God's image. But the Israelites of old times thought of God, as we shall often notice in other stories, as having a body like that of a man, and as enthroned above the heavenly sea ; nor did they consider it impossible to see God. And so, too, our writer could think of man as being, even in body, God's likeness, just as a child is the likeness of his father.¹

There are several things in the narrative which do not accord with our purer conception of God's being. We must not disguise this fact. If a man of our own time, brought up under Christianity, entertained such opinions, we could feel but small respect for the clearness of his understanding and the purity of his religious perceptions. But we must judge the writer by the times in which he wrote, and, so judged, he stands very high.

All the peoples of antiquity worshipped a number of superior beings, and made the powers of nature into gods. At

¹ Genesis v. 3.

first the Israelites, like others, stood upon this level. They, too, once recognised the existence of numerous gods, and worshipped the powers of nature and the heavenly bodies, together with a great variety of other objects. It cost them much time and great efforts to shake themselves free from these ideas, and rise to the belief in one God, who is exalted above nature, and can be distinguished from her. Yet in the first account of the creation we find this belief. From the chastened simplicity of this poetical and childlike description of the formation of the universe, a voice falls upon our ear: There is one supreme being, whose plan is fulfilled, who must be adored as the creator, whose work praises its maker. And if upon the earth man has dominion over everything that is created, and all is subject to him, it is because he bears God's image.

O Lord ! how great is thy name upon earth,
 Whilst thou hast revealed thy glory in heaven !
When I look on thy heaven, the work of thy fingers,
 The moon and the stars thou hast placed thereon,
What is man that thou art mindful of him ?
 And the son of man that thou carest for him ?
Thou hast made him but little less than a deity,
 And hast crowned him with honour and majesty.
Thou makest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands,
 And thou puttest all things under his feet,
Small and great cattle together,
 And the beasts of the field also,
The birds of the air, and the fish of the sea
 That go by the paths of the seas.
Lord ! how great is thy name above all the world !¹

¹ Psalm viii.

CHAPTER II.

PARADISE.

GEN. II. 4—24.

THE first book of the Bible is generally called by a Greek name, Genesis, that is, *Origin*. It is the first of a group of five books called, in Hebrew, the *Thorah* (that is, the Law), and, in Greek, the *Pentateuch* (that is, the book in five parts), the writing of which is referred by tradition to Moses, since the laws which make up the greater part of it were ascribed to him. We have already told you how little ground there is for this tradition, in the Introduction, and by-and-by we shall establish the point more fully.

Now, this book of Genesis comprises a great number of legends, all of which take us back to a hoary antiquity, and make up a kind of preliminary history of Israel. In speaking of the earliest generations of mankind, and especially of the tribal fathers of the Israelites, they give us an insight into the modes of thought of the writers, and on that account are very precious contributions to our knowledge of the Israelite religion. Besides this, they give us a certain amount of information, though of a very vague description, as to the origin of the Israelite people and the tribes connected with it.

The book of Genesis was not written by one man, but was put together from works of very different dates; works, too, whose authors by no means all stood upon the same religious level. This very chapter will furnish us with illustrations of the fact, for immediately after the first account of the creation, which we have just examined, a second follows, which by no means agrees with it.

Here, then, is the second account of the creation:—

When Yahweh made earth and heaven, no plants were

to be seen growing upon the earth, and no herbs coming up, for as yet he had caused no rain to fall, and there was not a man to till the ground. But then a mist rose from the earth, and there came rain out of it, by which all the earth was watered. Then Yahweh made the body of a man out of the moistened dust of the earth, and blew into his nostrils the breath of life. So man became a living being. Yahweh then made a garden in the eastern portion of the land of Loveliness (Eden), and there he put the man whom he had formed. Then he made all kinds of beautiful fruit trees come up out of the earth, and planted the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden.

Now, from the land of Loveliness a river flows, which waters the garden and then runs off into four branches—namely, the Pison, which washes all Havilah, that is India, the land where fine gold and spices and precious stones are found in such abundance; the Gihon, that is the Nile, which runs round all Ethiopia; the Hiddekel, that is the Tigris, which flows through Assyria; and the Phrat, or Euphrates.

Into this garden Yahweh brought the man, to cultivate and watch it. He gave him leave to eat of all the fruit trees, except of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil, for he was to die at once if he ate any of its fruit.

But Yahweh saw that it was not good for the man to be alone, and determined to make a being for him similar to himself, who might be able to help him. But first he made out of the earth all the beasts of the field, as well as the birds, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them, intending to keep as the name of every living thing the word which he used for it. And the man gave names to all the animals, but he did not find one like himself among them.

Then Yahweh made a deep sleep fall upon the man, and when he was buried in this sleep, he took one of his ribs, and,

having filled up the hole that it made with flesh, he formed a woman out of it and brought her to the man. At once he recognised her as like himself; and, since she was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, she must, he said, have the name of "woman" (the Hebrew word for "woman" is derived from that for "man;" as if we were to speak of "man" and "she-man"), and the bond between man and woman must be closer than any other, even than that which binds the son to his parents.

It is obvious that this account of the creation departs in many points from the previous one. In this account the earth is at first a dry plain, in the other the world was a chaos, covered with water. While in the former account God first creates the plants, then the animals, and finally man, here the succession is quite different, for the plants do not grow up until after the man has been made, and the garden in the land of Eden has received its occupant before the animals are made, while the creation of the woman closes the series. There are other points of difference which we shall have to notice when we speak of the sequel of the two narratives. Thus, for example, in the first account of the creation, grain and herbs are given to man as food from the moment of his creation, whereas, according to this writer, he only eats fruits at first, and the use of grain for food is treated as a consequence of his sin. This narrative is far more varied in its colouring, and, therefore, more lively than the first, which excels in lofty simplicity. Of Yahweh, who makes a man out of clay, and blows the breath of life into his nostrils, lays out a garden, and forms a woman out of a rib of the man, we gain a very different impression from that of the God of the first account, who, throned above the sky and the clouds, calls everything into being by his creative word. Even the idea of man's being formed out of dust

moistened by rain, and being made a living being by Yahweh's breathing into him, may seem rather childish in our eyes, but the idea of the woman being made out of a rib of the man strikes us as almost ludicrous. But, to avoid misunderstanding the people of antiquity, we must always bear in mind their love of clothing their thoughts in tangible forms. This representation, like so many others, is symbolical. The ribs lie in a man's side, and so the story that woman was formed out of a rib of man signifies that she ought to stand by his side. It is, therefore, a part of the same whole as the words which are put into the man's mouth when he sees the woman, in which he expresses the closeness of the marriage tie.

While the writer of the first account places the creation of mankind on the sixth day, without saying how many men were created or where they lived, here we have a detailed statement on these points. It is true that the writer does not say in so many words that all mankind are descended from a single pair, and indeed he soon forgets altogether, as we shall see by-and-by, that, according to his account, there were only two human beings upon the earth; but he only tells us about a single man and a single woman, and gives us detailed information as to the place of their abode. This was the land of Eden, between the four rivers that rise out of a single stream flowing through Eden, all of which he mentions by name. Two of these can be pointed out with certainty, namely the Euphrates and the Tigris; nor is it difficult to recognise the Nile in the Gihon, which washes the land of Cush, that is Ethiopia; and even the first, the Pison, is indicated with sufficient clearness by the further statement that it flows round the region of gold, that is India, from which it appears that the writer had either the Indus or the Ganges in his mind. It will be useless to look in the maps, however, for any place where

these four rivers rise out of a single stream, and we must forgive the ancient Israelites for not being very well up in geography, and for imagining that the sources of one of the Indian rivers and of the Nile were to be found close by those of the Euphrates and the Tigris, for they had no maps in those days, and were almost entirely without the means of forming a correct idea of the position of the various countries of the world. But it is evident whereabouts the writer looks for the cradle of our race, namely in central Asia, on the table-lands of Armenia. There are other ancient legends of the Israelites which allude to these regions, from which they originally came.

It is worth noticing that one of the Persian accounts of the creation has certain points of similarity with this Israelite story; in the description of a pleasure garden, for instance, the position of which is defined by mentioning the rivers near it, and agrees with that of Eden. This has made some people think that the ancestors of the Israelites and the tribes related to them once lived with the ancestors of the Persians, at the foot of Mount Caucasus, and that there one and the same cosmogony was current amongst them all, but that when the tribes had separated from each other it gradually got so much altered that the stories made out of it only just betray their common origin in one or two features. This is quite conceivable; but it is also possible that when the Israelites came into contact with the Syrians and Assyrians they picked up a certain cosmogony from them, and that the writer of this narrative worked it up in accordance with his own ideas, and gave an Israelite tinge to the story. This opinion is supported by a certain trait in the narrative which is altogether un-Israelite, as we shall see when speaking of what follows.

The picture of the condition in which, according to this writer, the first human beings lived, is a matter of greater

interest to us than the fixing of the site of their abode. They lived in a garden in the land of Loveliness. In the middle of this garden stood a tree—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As yet they had not eaten of its fruit, and they were even forbidden to taste it. So they were not morally and religiously developed human beings, for so far from bearing themselves bravely in the good fight—the fight against sensuality—to say nothing of having gained the victory, they had not as yet so much as entered upon such a contest at all. So they were happy in their ignorance. The Apostle Paul thoroughly understood the old story of Paradise when he said¹ that in contrast to Jesus, whom he called the second Adam, the first Adam was earthly, sensual. The golden age, therefore, or rather the golden day, with which the history of mankind begins, was a state of ignorance and innocence, soon succeeded by strife, by sin, by misery.

Each one of us has lived in a paradise like this; for as long as we were children we were ignorant, and, therefore, innocent. There is something so pure and sweet in this condition that it is easy to understand why Jesus loved and blessed the children. But the careless joy of ignorance which falls to the lot of a child soon passes by, for it learns before long what duty means. Its parents strive to teach it what is good and what is bad; and, as soon as it has eaten of the tree of this knowledge, its paradise is lost.

¹ 1 Corinthians xv. 45—47.

CHAPTER III.

PARADISE LOST.

GEN. II. 25—III.

THE same writer whose work we have just been considering continues his narrative as follows, and tells us how paradise was lost, chiefly through the guilt of the woman :

Happy in their childlike condition and their ignorance the man and his wife lived in paradise. They went entirely naked, but with no sense of shame, and did not eat of the tree that stood in the middle of the garden for fear of the threat that they would die at once if they did so. But one of the beasts of the field that Yahweh had made was cleverer than any of the others ; it was the serpent. It knew the secret thought of the Creator, and betrayed it to the woman. For one day it said to her : “Has not God forbidden you to eat of some of these trees ?” To which the woman answered : “We may eat of all the trees except the one that stands in the middle of the garden, for if we so much as touch that one—so God told us—we shall die.” But the serpent replied : “That is not true. God knows very well that if you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will attain to the knowledge of good and evil, and that will make you like God.” Shaken in her trust in Yahweh by these words, the woman went to examine the tree more narrowly, and since the fruit had a beautiful and delicious appearance, her heart soon went after her eyes. She gathered, she ate, and gave some of it to her husband as well, and he followed her example.

Now it appeared that the serpent had spoken the truth, for hardly had they eaten of the forbidden fruit, when their

eyes were opened, and they began to be ashamed of their nakedness, which they tried at once to cover, as best they could, with fig leaves fastened together.

But when, as the sun went down and the evening breeze began to blow,¹ they heard Yahweh, who was walking in the garden, drawing near to them, they were ashamed of their insufficient clothing, so they hid themselves among the trees to escape being seen by him in such a state. But Yahweh called to the man : " Where are you ?" The answer was that he had hidden himself because he was ashamed of his nakedness. Then Yahweh replied : " Who enlightened you so much that you are ashamed of that ? Have you eaten of that tree which I forbade you to use for food ?" " Yes," answered the man, " the woman that you gave me offered me some of it. That is how it was." On this, Yahweh spoke to the woman : " What is this that you have done ?" She answered in her turn that the serpent had tempted her to eat the fruit. Then Yahweh turned his wrath upon the serpent : " A curse upon you," said he. " I will degrade you below all the cattle and all the beasts of the field. Henceforth you shall creep upon your belly, and lick up the dust all your life long. And I will wake up enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers. Men shall try to stamp on your head, and you to bite them in the heel." Nor did the woman escape her punishment ; she was to bear children, and bring them into the world with pain ; and while she felt herself strongly drawn towards the man, he was to be her master. Then God said to the man : Because you allowed yourself to be tempted by your wife to disobey my commandment, the earth shall be cursed for your sake. It shall bring forth thorns and thistles for you ; and, meanwhile, instead of

¹ After an amended version.

living, as you have done hitherto, on the fruits of trees, you shall henceforth eat grain and potherbs, which you will have to wring from the earth by the sweat of your brow, until you pay the debt of nature, for dust you are, and to dust you shall return again."

Then Yahweh, to enable the man and woman to come into sight again, gave them a covering of the hides of beasts, by which the whole body was clothed, instead of their fig-leaf aprons. But there was still one thing which Yahweh feared. "See!" he said to the divine beings round him, "in knowledge of good and evil man has become as one of us. Now, if he goes a step further and stretches out his hand to the Tree of Life and eats of it, then he will be altogether like us." So Yahweh drove man out of the garden of Eden to cultivate the soil out of which he was made, and stationed the cherubs with a glittering sword at the entrance of the garden to guard the approach to the tree of life.

If there is one Bible story more than another that has suffered from the artificial efforts of commentators, and been dismembered and distorted by them till it is hardly recognisable, it is this story of paradise. Treading in the steps of the Apostle Paul,¹ but going much further than he did, the teachers of the Christian Church have run up a whole block of doctrinal edifices on the basis of this story. They have taken it as history, and have supposed it to state that Adam and his wife were created in absolute holiness, that they were perfect in body, healthy and free from pain and violent passions, and that their souls in like manner were endowed with perfect knowledge of God, with the power of loving him, and with immortality. But they allowed themselves—and it was supposed that this too was written in the

¹ Romans v. 12. 1 Corinthians xv. 22, 45.

ancient document—to be tempted by the Devil, and so all kinds of disasters fell to their lot, amongst others death, and inability to know or to serve God. This corruption passed down to all their descendants, who are therefore guilty before God. This is called original sin.

Not a word of all this is to be found in our story. We have seen already that the first human beings, according to this description, were not perfect, since they did not even know the difference between good and evil. Moreover, a serpent does no doubt appear in it, but not a devil. Nothing is said of a fall, but only of progress. And, so far from death being represented as the consequence of the sin of the first man and woman, Yahweh dreads, even after their trespass, that their presumption may sometime tempt them to lay their hand upon the tree of life. According to the writer, then, they were not immortal before their sin, and did not become so after it.

Let us try to understand the legend of paradise.

The story about the loss of paradise is not altogether original. Certain traits in it appear in similar legends amongst various peoples, so as to make it probable that one and the same story lay at the foundation of all these sagas. Hence, doubtless, our writer borrowed, amongst other things, his representation of the monsters called cherubs, winged creatures in the shape of animals, griffins, which serve as the guardians of a treasure; for, as “cherub” is not a word of Hebrew origin, the whole idea is, in all probability, derived from elsewhere. We do not know how the original story ran. But the comparison of other versions of it, for instance that of the Persians, is instructive. “Mashia and Mashianeh” (that is “man and woman”), so we are told by one of them, “were created in holiness, and had received commandment from the supreme God, Ahura, to cherish good thoughts, to speak good words, to do good deeds, and not to sacrifice

to the evil spirits. But after some time their thoughts were polluted by the Evil One, and they began to worship him. After that they wandered about for thirty days without food and in black clothes, and then they caught a white goat and drank some of its milk. This sin was followed by a still greater one, the eating of flesh, and then by another still heavier yet, for when they had discovered iron they felled trees. At last they worshipped the evil spirits."

From this story we can ascertain the moral standpoint of this Persian writer, in whose eyes drinking milk, eating flesh, and felling trees were just as much sins as idolatry. In the same way, from the Israelite story of paradise, we gain an insight into the ideas of its writer. We shall see presently that all the Israelites did not agree with him.

The story is an attempt to explain the conditions under which the writer saw mankind existing. He noticed round about him certain mysterious facts. In the animal creation, his eye fell upon that wonderful creature, the serpent, that goes hissing about on its belly, that animal of which man is the mortal enemy, and against the insidious attacks of which he must always be on his guard, although—for in the land of the Jews there were no poisonous or gigantic serpents—he can easily overcome it. That creature, thought the Israelite writer, is apparently under a curse, and he asked: How has it brought this curse upon itself? Then he was struck by the sad lot of woman. That she could only taste a mother's joys at the price of so much pain excited his pity. But his sympathy was most strongly roused when he saw how she longed for the marriage bond, although it made her nothing but the slave of her husband. But even he was not happy. It was, in the East especially, a hard task to force her fruits from the earth. Why is this so? asked our writer. Why do so many weeds grow as to make the husbandman's task a burden?

He looked for the answer to these questions, and he thought he had found it in the supposition that the deity, angry with the serpent and mankind, had laid these woes upon them to punish them for their trespasses. The sin which had drawn all these evils upon mankind was the search for knowledge. The state of nature was far more simple and happy than the present condition of man. The infant danced naked in its mother's lap, with no sense of shame. Some peoples knew no clothing, others were content with a scanty covering. This condition of innocence was indeed lower in the writer's opinion than that in which man existed when possessed of moral knowledge and cultivation, but yet it was really happier. God surely had not intended that man should grow out of it. Why had not he been content with his humbler position? Why had he not left the knowledge of good and evil to God, to whom it belongs? Alas! man had striven after things too high for him, and he had actually reached that higher point, but only at the price of his own peace. His higher dignity had brought pain with it. Much sorrow accompanied the gathering of wisdom.¹ So the paradise of the childlike state was lost and gone.

In the description of the confusion of the man and woman as they stand ashamed—he throwing the blame upon her and she upon the serpent—great knowledge of human nature is displayed, and great talent in reproducing what has been observed. There is a fine point in the man's excuse: I was tempted by the woman "that you gave me"—as if he intended to make Yahweh partly responsible for the trespass.

But in other respects, and very important ones too, our writer does not stand high. In the first place, as we have

¹ Ecclesiastes i. 18.

already noticed,¹ his conception of Yahweh is defective. We must add a few words to what has been said on this subject already. Yahweh's walking in the garden, and clothing man in the garments made from the hides of beasts, are only such actions as we saw him doing in the former story, at the creation of man. We do not expect anyone who makes such a representation of his god to think of him as the only god; and, indeed, our writer does not so think of him.

Strictly speaking, this follows from the use of a particular divine name. For, if there is only one god, why should we give him a proper name? As long as there was only one man, he was called "the man," as is the case all through this story, even after the woman has been created; and it is not till afterwards, when other men are spoken of as well, that the name, "man," is used as a proper name, Adam. So everyone who recognises only one god calls him God, and nothing else. It is true that the Israelites who had risen above the standpoint of polytheism, and recognised no other god but Yahweh, long continued to use this name; but this only shows the influence of the old custom of language. Our writer, on the other hand, unmistakably recognises the existence of many gods; for he makes Yahweh say: "See, the man is become as *one of us*, knowing good and evil;" and so he evidently implies the existence of other similar beings, to whom he attributes immortality and insight into the difference between good and evil. Yahweh, then, was, in his eyes, the god of gods, indeed, but not the only god.

But there are other things to notice in this story besides the fact that the writer thinks of his Yahweh under a human form and only as one of the gods. These are to a great extent

¹ See p. 54.

mistakes of the intellect; but it shocks us more to find that he ascribes very ignoble dispositions to Yahweh. For we cannot conceal the fact that the serpent, when speaking to the woman, tells nothing but the truth. Yahweh had really deceived the man and woman when he threatened them with death if they ate of the tree of knowledge. Not death, but the gift of distinguishing evil from good, by which they were made like to God, was the result of their tasting this fruit. Yahweh evidently kept them off this tree from jealousy, and he drove them out of the garden because he was afraid that by eating of the Tree of Life as well, they would become altogether like the gods. Now this idea, that the gods are jealous of the men who aspire to a share in their privileges, is found elsewhere, in some of the Greek writers for instance; but it certainly is not worthy of God.

Our writer thought with the prophet Michah,¹ that to be righteous and to walk humbly with his God was man's vocation. He could have repeated the words of the poet:²

Lord ! I am not proud hearted,
 And mine eyes are not lifted in pride ;
 I have not conversed with things too high and too wonderful for me.
 Truly I have brought my soul to rest and quietness ;
 As a weaned child, without desire, lies on his mother's breast,
 So my soul is passionless in me.

And certainly there is something enviable in this rest of the soul. Nay, it may even be the glorious reward of the conquest over the earthly inclinations, and the subjection of our desires to the will of God. But there is also a humility of disposition, a freedom from passion, which is bought at far too dear a price, and springs from an unhallowed source. For if we do not long to go onward—if we do not strain all our powers in the struggle for knowledge and blessedness—if we allow needless ignorance and misery to exist in our-

¹ Micah vi. 8.

² Psalm cxxxi.

selves or in others—then this contentment is the fruit, not of humility, but of idleness, which brings moral death in its train. The psalm of submission must be no lullaby.

It was not unnatural for an Israelite who saw how many woes, how hard a struggle fell to the lot of man, saw too that they were the result of the pressing claims of society, and that wants were increased by civilisation, to look back sometimes with a kind of home-sickness towards the state of nature in which men did not feel these wants and life was simpler. Anyone who knows something of life can understand this well enough, for sometimes it is very weary work. We agree with the poet of the story of paradise, as he perceives and describes how the raising of man's rank brings with it a greater task to perform, and how he has to pay a heavy price for his noble privilege of being like God, and knowing good from evil. But we can by no means allow with him that this is contrary to the will of God. No, we are more at one with the poets of the first chapter of Genesis and of the eighth Psalm, who glory in the thought that God has made man after his image, has crowned him with glory, and has therefore given him dominion over all creation.

And so, however sweet that murmuring song may sound, "I have brought my soul to rest and quietness," the rousing war-cry of the sons of God rings back upon our ears: "No rest for us! work, search, learn, for that alone is life!"

The state of innocence is lost, the state of simplicity and ignorance. We are no longer children. Are we to mourn over it? No. This condition cannot and must not last. But, whenever, as stained by many a sin and broken by many a sorrow we pursue our way, the state of childhood seems enviable in our eyes, then let us listen to the words of him who urges us indeed to become children once more,¹ but, also, to be perfect even as God is perfect.²

¹ Matthew xviii. 1—3.

² Matthew v. 48.

CHAPTER IV.

CAIN AND HIS POSTERITY.

GEN. IV.

BUT though paradise was lost—so we are told by the same writer—the first human pair still dwelt in the land of Eden. It soon appeared that the man had good reason to call his wife Eve, that is the *life-waker*, for she presented him with two sons, the elder of whom she called Cain, that is, the *gained*, “for,” said she, “with Yahweh’s help, I have gained a son, a man.” The second was called Abel, that is, *evanescence*. The younger chose the shepherd’s life, while Cain became a husbandman. Once on a time they both determined to bring some of their possessions as an offering to Yahweh. They gave of the produce of their labour—Cain of the fruits of the field, Abel of the first-born of his sheep and goats, especially the fat of these animals; and with this last offering Yahweh was pleased, but not with that of Cain. We are not told how this fact was made known to the two sacrificers, but the idea probably is that Yahweh, who was with them in person, told it to them by word of mouth. Now, Cain could not endure being placed below his brother; and his sullen countenance, fixed on the ground, betrayed clearly enough how he was eaten up by anger. So Yahweh came to give him a warning. “Cain,” said he, “why do you hang down your head in anger? Can you not lift up your face boldly if you do well?¹ But be careful! If you enter upon the crooked way, sin lies in wait for you, as a beast of prey crouching at the door of your house; but you must master it.” Cain,

¹ After an amended version.

however, far from attending to this good advice, dogged the footsteps of his brother,¹ and as soon as ever they were in the field together, struck him dead.

Then Yahweh came again to Cain and asked: "Where is Abel, your brother?" And Cain answered: "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?" But Yahweh replied: "What have you done? The blood of your brother cries to me from out of the ground. Now, listen: Be thou cursed, and cast out from the land which has opened its mouth to take up the brother's blood which you have spilt. When you work upon it, it shall not put forth its strength to serve you. For you it shall be unfruitful, and so you shall roam and wander up and down the earth."

Then Cain, terrified by this curse, cried out: "The punishment is too hard to bear! See, you have banished me from this land, and will never think of me again; and likely enough as I roam and wander over the earth, anyone that happens to meet me will kill me." But Yahweh answered him; "Yes! but to avert that danger, Cain shall be avenged sevenfold." Moreover, to protect him as far as possible, Yahweh fixed upon a sign by which anyone who was about to raise his hand against Cain should be warned.

As soon as his sentence was pronounced he left Eden, where Yahweh dwelt, and, after journeying eastwards, settled in the land of wandering (Nod). There his wife presented him with a son, after whom he called the town which he founded Enoch. Enoch had a son Irad, and Irad a son Mehujael, who was the father of Methusael and the grandfather of Lamech.

Now Lamech took two wives, called Adah and Zillah, whose children were very celebrated men. Adah's sons were Jabal and Jubal, the first of whom instituted the

¹ After an amended version.

wandering shepherd life, while the second was the discoverer of various musical instruments, such as the lyre and the pipe. Zillah gave birth to Tubal-cain, the copper and iron smith, and his sister, Naamah.

Then Lamech, proud of his metal weapons, said to his wives :—

Adah and Zillah ! hear my voice,
Ye wives of Lamech hearken to my speech !
Truly I slew a man for a wound,
And a lad for a stripe he had given me !
If Cain is avenged sevenfold,
Then Lamech seven and seventy.

After Abel's death, and Cain's banishment from Eden, Eve had a third son there, and she gave him the name of Seth, that is the *given*, "because," said she, "God has given me a compensation for Abel." Seth's son was called Enos, and in his days the worship of Yahweh began.

This story is not only from the same hand as the previous one, but is so closely connected with it that the same idea plays a chief part in both. As we have seen, the writer of the story of paradise considered the state of nature, that is, the condition of ignorance and of the innocence which goes along with it, as the state of man which God willed, and he explained man's struggle for something higher as a consequence of sin. In the story of Cain and his posterity he worked out this notion further. He pointed out the progress made by men in every direction ; how they had invented musical instruments and discovered the art of forging copper and iron ; how towns had been built by them, and the wandering shepherd life established too. But *what* men had invented all this ? The Cainites, the posterity of the murderer of his brother, the exiles from Eden, where the worship of Yahweh was not introduced till their connection with that land of paradise had been severed. And what

advantage had this progress of the Cainites brought with it? What fruit had they gathered from this art of bending the hard metals into the form that pleased them? None. Surely it had taught them how to make a sword, and to tip their arrows and spears? Yes; and the discovery made them all the more savage and overweening. Strong in the possession of copper and iron, Lamech could swear sevenfold vengeance on anyone who should kill him, for his sons would avenge him. And woe to the man who wounded him, for even that offence would meet the penalty of death! That is what comes of all this progress and knowledge, though the writer. Such was the course of man after the loss of his innocence. The history of Adam's eldest son and of his race begins with a murder and ends with a wild song of vengeance.

This is the main idea of the story which we are now to examine in detail. It would be an important addition to our knowledge of antiquity if we knew the source from which the writer took the names with which he connected the various inventions of which he speaks, and the original meaning of these names, which are met with in the following story in quite a different order. The writer treats them as men, but it does not follow that that is what they really were.

If asked: What else can they have been? we might answer: Perhaps they were the names of gods, to whose teaching the origin of these occupations or the knowledge of these arts was ascribed. This is not unlikely. Several of the names are to be found amongst other nations as well as amongst the Israelites. Thus Jabal is a good deal like the name of the Greek and Roman god, Apol(lo), and Tubal-cain is the Hebrew pronunciation of the name pronounced Vulcan by the Romans, and used by them for the smith of the gods; while Set was an Egyptian god.

Moreover, it quite agrees with the ancient usage, which we find among all kinds of nations, to attribute the earliest discoveries and inventions, and everything that brought about a great change in human life, to the immediate revelation of a deity. No wonder! Who first built a town it was surely impossible to say; for necessity must gradually have forced people to hedge or wall-in their dwelling places as a defence against their enemies, whether beasts or men. Gradually some of them would begin to wander round about to look for pastures for the beasts which they had tamed and used as domestic animals. The possibility of producing various sounds by striking or blowing upon strings under tension, and upon the horns of animals or lengths of reed, was certainly often noticed before, step by step, man learned to make musical instruments. The case is the same with forging. Since it is natural to men who are at a low stage of development, and have not been accustomed to think much, to deify all the powers and gifts of nature, and even individual objects, it is not unnatural that they should worship a god "Copper-smith," or "Shepherd-life," or "City-building." And it is very natural that they should attribute to the revelation of the Sun, or of some other god, their knowledge of all kinds of useful arts.

We ought, however, to be very cautious in venturing upon guesses such as these; for it is almost like groping about in the dark to speak of such ancient times, and the thoughts of the men who lived in them. There are many other ways in which these names may have become connected with such inventions and social changes. They may have been names of men or tribes which were afterwards deified by certain peoples. We must be all the more cautious, as the meaning of the names is generally unknown to us, nor can we even say from what language they are derived. The writer certainly gives us translations of several of

them, but they rest apparently upon nothing but conjecture, for Seth cannot really mean "the given," nor Cain, "the obtained." On the other hand, the names Abel and Nod, as well as Adam, Eve and Eden, are pure Hebrew words, and were probably invented by the writer himself. The Israelites were certainly no masters of the art of translating foreign names, whether they had come down to them from former days, or had been transplanted from other lands. None of the translations, which appear in great numbers in the book of Genesis and elsewhere, have any value, except in so far as they show us what the writers thought about the names in question. In future we shall not notice the incorrectness of their derivations, except when there is some important reason for doing so.

However much we should like to know the origin and the meaning of these names, and the way in which they came to the knowledge of our writer, we must be content to give the question up; and fortunately our ignorance does not prevent our reading the writer's heart, for whatever may have been the original meaning of these names, it is evident that in his eyes they were simply the names of men. As we are not considering a historical record, we need not stop to ask such questions as, "How did Cain come by a wife?" "How can he have been afraid that people would kill him, when as yet there were none?" "How can he have built a city, when he had only one son?" We must examine the writer's ideas about the god he worshipped, about his will, and the way in which he revealed it.

As a matter of course we find the same narrow conception of Yahweh here that we noticed in the story of paradise. It is not, indeed, expressly stated that the reason why Yahweh preferred Abel's present to Cain's was, that the one brought him a sacrifice of flesh, while the other only consecrated

fruits of the field to him. It is possible that the writer had that higher conception of what constitutes the value of a sacrifice, which led one of the Christians of the time of the Apostles to explain that Abel brought a better sacrifice than Cain's by faith.¹ This is possible, for the idea was familiar to some of the Israelites; but it is not likely. At least the account of Yahweh's acceptance of the one sacrifice and rejection of the other follows so close upon the mention of the nature of the gifts that the difference between them really seems to have been taken into account in the sentence; nor did the Israelites ever offer a sacrifice of grain or anything of that kind, except when they had not an animal to give.² But, however this may be, we see that his conception of his god was not very exalted, from Yahweh's giving immediate expression to his approval or disapproval of the sacrifices offered him, and holding a conversation with Cain, and still more from the fact that he lives in Eden only, so that an exile from that land can no longer share his protection.

Equally childlike is the writer's idea of nature. She feels for man, and is angry with his sin. No doubt, as we read in the story that the voice of the blood spilt by a brother's hand cries out for vengeance, and that the ground which has drunk it up refuses to bear fruit for the murderer, we are inclined to consider these expressions as metaphorical, and to regard them as poetical forms of speech. So, in exalted style, we too speak of a sin "which cries to heaven," and say that things are "enough to make the angels weep." Such expressions are figurative; but, when they were first used, they were figurative only in a very different sense from that in which they are so now. To us they are metaphorical, but to the men of primeval times they were a full expression of the truth. In those days full grown people thought, as

¹ Hebrews xi. 4.

² Leviticus v. 11.

children do still, that everything was alive. Their idea was that blood literally cried out for vengeance, and that the earth itself punished the murderer. How could Yahweh have known that Cain had slain his brother, if his blood had not revealed it? Hence the popular belief, not uncommon among the Israelites and others, that when innocent blood was spilt, it cried for vengeance louder if it remained uncovered, than if it had sunk into the ground and was hidden by earth.¹

But, however childlike we may consider the writer's ideas of nature and of Yahweh's character, they did not prevent his feeling the deepest reverence for his god, and ascribing great power to him. Why was such a barbarous law of vengeance observed among the Cainites? Why must a murder be avenged amongst them sevenfold? The answer he gives to this question is very clear. In the land of the Cainites, the land of Wandering, Yahweh did not dwell. Cain was withdrawn from his eye. In consequence, there was less security there, and human life was in greater danger than in the place where Yahweh dwelt, and could protect his favourites. It is true that although Yahweh did not follow Cain into the land of exile, yet he exercised some power even there. For there, too, he appointed signs; there, too, the leaves rustled ominously, or the light of the sun was reddened, or a night-bird gave a threatening screech, when anyone would raise his hand against the life of a fellow man. But, as Yahweh could not prevent the murder there, the law of vengeance must be made all the fiercer.

A lively gratitude for his privileges as an Israelite evidently filled the soul of this writer. For in mentioning the cruel customs of those outside Eden, within which land alone were prayers to Yahweh offered, he was doubtless quite aware that this bloody law of vengeance did actually exist among

¹ Job xvi. 18, Ezekiel xxiv. 7, 8.

the peoples who lived outside Canaan. In his estimation, Canaan was an Eden; it is true that Paradise was lost, and even there the earth bore thorns and thistles, but yet it was well with those in the holy land. There the just and gentle law of compensation was acknowledged. There the rule, "Eye for eye, stripe for stripe," was observed, and no further punishment was inflicted on the evil doer. Outside Canaan, on the other hand, among hordes of barbarians, this limitation of vengeance did not exist; there, if the injured one were strong enough, a sevenfold payment of the debt was sometimes exacted. For this milder law of punishment, Israel was indebted to his god, who was honoured in Canaan alone. Where Yahweh did not rule, a savage code of laws was necessary for the protection of human life.

In his views of social life, our writer cannot be acquitted of onesidedness. We may, perhaps, consider him a man of old-fashioned views, looking with suspicion on all progress in arts and sciences, and turning with a kind of home-sickness towards a simpler mode of life. He seems to have thought that this style of life existed chiefly among the inhabitants of villages, as he finds a place both for the wandering life of the shepherd tribes and the building of cities among the practices introduced by the exiles from Eden, the descendants of the murderer of his brother. He was certainly a townsman therefore, for anyone who is acquainted with the country knows very well that there is just as much immorality there as there is in the towns. Moreover, our writer believed that a greater purity and simplicity than characterised life in his days had been the portion of the earliest generations of mankind, but had been lost by the development of arts and sciences. Was he right in this opinion? Was the old state of society really the best? Surely not. It is not easy for us, who have

known from infancy so many means of sustaining life and giving it a grace, altogether to transport ourselves to the position of men of the earliest ages, when it was considered a new idea, quite a valuable discovery, to throw a wall round a few houses that stood near together; when the use of copper and iron was as yet unknown, and there were no musical instruments, not even a shepherd's pipe or an ox-horn. But ancient and modern travellers have certainly told us enough of the life of the races who are still at this low stage of development, and the diligence of antiquaries has certainly made out enough from the remains of the dwellings, weapons, food, furniture and tombs of the men of prehistoric times, to prevent our wishing their days to come back again to us.

The earliest period from which sufficient remains have as yet been discovered to enable us to form any idea of human life at the time, is called the Age of Stone, because wood and stone were the only substances then known, out of which implements could be made. Next came the Age of Bronze, in which this mixture of tin and copper was used to make implements, weapons, musical instruments and ornaments. Finally, the Age of Iron succeeded. It is easy to imagine how much toil it must have cost the men of this Age of Stone, or even of Bronze, to make their houses and boats. Even in the Age of Stone, it is true, many arts were practised, both in our quarter of the globe and elsewhere. Enough was known to enable people to construct regular villages upon stakes in the middle of lakes; they cultivated the soil, and kept great flocks and herds; nay, even at that early age, the art of weaving and plaiting was understood, and a bartering trade was carried on with distant tribes. But, for all that, they must often have felt a pinching want of the necessaries of daily life. No doubt the population of the different countries was thin, the mortality very high, and life utterly comfortless.

With the discovery of the art of forging iron, a new path of progress was opened up. As man's resources increased, he was better and better able to work out his destiny, and become the lord of nature. Life grew richer and fuller, less monotonous and more interesting. As better means were discovered for forcing nature to yield her treasures, people were enabled to live together in ever greater numbers. It is true that the instruments of destruction, so often turned by men against each other, became more terrible, and their mutual conflicts therefore bloodier; but, on the other hand, this very fact drove them to come to some mutual understanding, to found states and to make laws.

It cannot be denied that music, for instance, often causes mischief, that it is often used to rouse impure ideas, that the multiplication of the means of enjoyment, of which this is but one, has often been a snare to mankind. But are we, therefore, to wish that time back again when men were so incapable and uncultivated as still to be unable to practise any of the arts? Just as if these arts could not raise holy as well as evil thoughts!

Everything can be abused; nay, everything is abused. But the fact that God's gifts are often applied to a bad purpose must not tempt us to declare that they are the fruits of sin.

So the writer of the story of the Cainites is altogether wrong, when he brands social progress as the source of moral degradation. Those who ranked the first discoverers among the gods were nearer the mark than he; for it is in truth God's will that mankind should raise themselves out of the state of ignorance, that is of barbarism. Progress in science and art is not indeed the highest of which man is capable, and it may be coupled with growing immorality; but, for all that, it is a good gift, and he that works earnestly for its sake does something towards increasing human happiness, and,

in so far, is doing the will of God. Culture, indeed, is not devoutness, but still less is the absence of culture. Science and art alone do not make a man all that he ought to be, but ignorance and insensibility to what is beautiful are surely no quickeners of piety, but are great blemishes on the character of any man, and are often ruinous in their effects.

But, however one-sided may be the view of life which our writer takes, there is something in his one-sidedness which makes us respect him. For his reason for looking so unfavourably upon social progress is, that he sees a danger to morality in it. He objects both to life in cities and to life in tents; to the first, no doubt, because of the greater luxury which generally accompanies it; to the last, because of the rudeness and fierceness of the wandering tribes. He curses the invention of iron-founding, for the warrior, emboldened by the possession of a sword, has small respect for human life. Music is an unholy thing to him, for are not drinking bouts graced by it? Although these views are mistaken, yet they show that a deep moral feeling filled the writer. Horror of sin, of luxury, and of cruelty dictate his words, and he is drawn towards simplicity and purity of life.

He has a quick eye, too, in tracing the first movements of sin in the heart of man. His Cain is drawn by the hand of a master. Jealousy makes him cast down his sullen countenance; for the man whose heart is not right cannot look the world in the face. This evil disposition is not checked. Sin leaps upon him. He becomes a murderer. He gives a surly answer when he is questioned by God about what he had done; just as we always notice, both with children and grown-up people, that when they have anything on their conscience which disturbs their peace of mind, but for which they are not penitent, they try to carry it off with a

bullying air, as if they intended to shout down God and man, just as they try to silence their own conscience. "I don't know where my brother is. Am I my brother's keeper?" So speaks the murderer, but as soon as he hears his sentence, his audacity breaks down and is succeeded by the utmost terror. No wonder! His sin cries to heaven. The earth accuses him. Abel's blood still speaks, even after he has been murdered, and cries out, "Vengeance!¹ Vengeance on the murderer of his brother!" And he goes forth upon his wanderings, bereft of God's guidance, and becomes the father of a godless offspring, whose posterity is ever more and more godless yet. So misery treads upon the heel of sin. In Eden, meanwhile, the places of the murderer and his victim are filled again, and before long Yahweh is worshipped there, though the murderer's race has forfeited his blessings.

CHAPTER V.

THE PATRIARCHS BEFORE THE FLOOD.

GEN. V.

THE story of the Cainites is followed in the book of Genesis by a family tree, drawn up by the same writer who gave us the first account of the creation, a reference to which occurs at its commencement. It runs as follows: These are the family archives of Adam. When God made men, he made them after his own image. Male and female created he them, and he blessed them, and gave them the name of "man" (Adam). Now, when Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years he begot a son after his likeness, as it were a copy of himself, and called him Seth.

¹ Hebrews xi. 4, xii. 24.

After his birth he lived eight hundred years and had sons and daughters. So altogether Adam was nine hundred and thirty years old. Then he died.

In this style the narrative goes on. The same particulars are given us concerning Adam's eldest son, viz., his age when his first son was born, how long he lived after that event, and how old he was when he died. The same information is given us of his descendants, one after another, of Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, and Noah; but the death of Noah is not mentioned here. The monotonous series is only broken by the story that Enoch walked with God three hundred years after the birth of his son and "was not, for God took him," and the statement that Noah's father gave him his name "because he must comfort us concerning our work and the painful labour of our hands, because of the ground which is cursed by Yahweh." This addition, from which we learn that the word Noah was understood by the writer to mean "comforter," is not from the same hand as the family register, and was inserted afterwards.

The men of the age before the flood are usually called forefathers, or patriarchs (that is, *chief fathers*), but this last word is more specially used for the ancestors of the Israelites, Abram and his sons. All these patriarchs before the flood are represented as reaching a great age; for Enoch, who died youngest of them all, was three hundred and sixty-five years old, and Methuselah, who reached the greatest age, was nine hundred and sixty-nine.

The last-mentioned patriarch is usually called Methusalem, but the cause of this has never been explained. It is easy to understand why we always speak of Eve and Abel, instead of Chavvah and Habel, as the names stand in the Hebrew, for in these cases and many others we follow the usage of our own translation of the Bible, which, in its turn,

often follows the Greek and Latin versions ; but in this case the old translations write Mathusala clearly enough, and the same spelling is adopted in our Bibles in the only place where the name occurs in the New Testament,¹ while in the Old Testament it is always spelt as above : Methuselah. The spelling Methusalem is very old, and is found as early as the beginning of the Christian era, but it is curious that it should have had so much influence over the language of the people as to supersede the pronunciation supported by the written tradition. This, however, in passing.

These names suggest more interesting subjects for our consideration. No one who has read them carefully and remembers the particulars of the preceding story can fail to notice that almost the same names occur in both narratives. Not only do both writers mention Adam, Seth, and Enos, but Enoch and Lamech too appear both among the Cainites and among the descendants of Seth, while Cain and Cainan, Irad and Jared, Mehujael and Mahalaleel, Methusael and Methuselah, bear so close a resemblance to each other (still closer in the original than in our Authorised Version), that it is as good as certain that they are the same names grouped together somewhat differently, and in some cases more or less corrupted in the process of handing down. This idea is very much strengthened by the fact that the compiler of this family tree knows nothing of Adam's sons, Cain and Abel, and speaks of Seth as of Adam's eldest son. Here, then, we have an example of two Israelites treating the same material in different ways. Both of them had got hold of certain names, either from traditions which may have been extremely old, or from foreign legends ; but their original meaning seems to have been entirely forgotten, and accordingly one of the writers worked them into a story about

¹ Luke iii. 37.

the murder of a brother, and the ever-growing corruption of the murderer's race, while the other set them in the list of Noah's ancestors.

As we read the statements made with such an appearance of accuracy about the age of each of the forefathers, when his son was born, and when he died himself, we cannot help feeling as if the story were a very faithful historical record. However unwilling we may be to allow the possibility of a man's living to nearly a thousand years of age, this accuracy of statement makes us ask: "May it not be true after all? If not, how did the writer get hold of all these numbers?" For a long time no answer could be given to this question; nor is it fully answered even now; but so much is certain, that many of these numbers were not taken from any old tradition at all, but were invented by the writer himself, and are parts of a chronological system. This fact becomes clear when we compare the family tree we have just been considering with the other sections of the book of which it is a part.

For this story is only a piece of a larger work, generally called *The Book of Origins*, which was written soon after the end of the Babylonian captivity, by a priest. Both the names and the events which he brings into his narrative are taken from several different sources, but the grouping and the colouring are his own. It is clear from every part of his work that he thought the course of history could be mapped out according to a regular system of chronology, such as is often found among the Egyptians and Babylonians. He believed that the world would last four thousand years, and that the Israelites came out of Egypt when exactly two-thirds of this period had elapsed, that is to say, two thousand six hundred and sixty-six years after the creation. He makes the Israelites dwell in Egypt just twice as long as their fathers wandered about in Canaan, that is four hundred and

thirty years. More calculations of this kind are to be found in the work; and when once we have discovered the writer's passion for reducing everything to a calculation, and bringing it under a system of numbers, of course we can no longer accept his statements as true.

But though most of the figures which occur in this family tree are parts of the writer's chronological system, there is one which is probably taken from ancient tradition, and that is the age of Enoch. We shall return to this presently.

Now, from this list of the forefathers and their ages it has been calculated how many years after the creation Noah was born; and, as his family tree is afterwards continued¹ in the same style, it has been thought possible to calculate the age of the world, or at least of the human race. In certain old books the dates of events from the creation of the world are given, and we can see in our almanacks that according to the Jewish reckoning this year, 1873, is the year 5633 from the creation. In the margin of many large Bibles, however, as well as in many books of dates we find it stated that the creation was four thousand years before the birth of Christ (four thousand and four years from the commencement of our era), which would make the year 1873 of our era the year 5877 after the creation. This difference is caused by the obscurity of the data and the contradictions between the various accounts to be found in the Bible. But the difference between these two calculations sinks into insignificance when we consider how far they are both wide of the truth. The Bible cannot really teach us the age of the world or of mankind; and people who are determined to make it do so only get laughed at by those who understand the subject, for being so prejudiced as to rely upon such erroneous statements. For geology and astronomy teach us

¹ Genesis xi. 10-26.

that the universe must at any rate be hundreds of millions of years old, and that even our earth counts its centuries by the thousand already; and though the historical researches which have brought to light the remains of the lake dwellings, the tombs of the age of stone, and the inscriptions of the Egyptian monuments, give us no certain information as to the antiquity of the human race, yet they make us smile at the figure 6000; for before this date a flourishing kingdom certainly existed in Egypt. Even the statue of the Egyptian king, Chephren, that was to be seen at the last international exhibition at Paris, was hewn about forty centuries before the beginning of our era.

While leaving it to the students of geology and history to fix the antiquity of the human race to the best of their power, we must answer another question before we leave this story from "the book of religion"—the question, namely, why the author ascribed such long lives to the forefathers, and what he intended to show by it.

But first one word about Enoch. The account of him is perplexingly short: "He walked with God, and he was not" (that is, he suddenly disappeared); "for God took him away." Nothing has ever been made of this except that he did not die, but was removed to heaven as a reward for his piety.¹ Perhaps this is really what the writer meant, but the curious brevity of his account, and the strange expression, "God took him away," which we should certainly have expected to find explained or worked out to some extent, make it probable that he took his story from some old tradition. Indeed, we can still make out with great likelihood what this tradition meant; for Enoch, whose age is lower than that of any of the other forefathers, is just as many years old as there

¹ Hebrews xi. 5.

are days in a solar year, that is, three hundred and sixty-five; and the name Enoch may be translated "Renewal." We can hardly help thinking, therefore, that the story is a short version of some ancient myth, and that Enoch is a personification of "the year, that after three hundred and sixty-five days, is not."

The shortness of the account of Enoch gave the imagination abundant occasion to work out the story in the Bible more fully; and the Jews of the last centuries before Jesus certainly did not let the opportunity slip. They represented Enoch as a preacher of righteousness and a proclaimer of God's judgments; and this gave one of them occasion to write a book in the name of Enoch that became very famous, and is even quoted in the New Testament¹ as sacred (canonical) scripture. It has lately been rediscovered in an Ethiopic translation.

We will now return to the statements made as to the great age reached by the forefathers. Properly to understand what the compiler of the family tree meant by them, we must compare this story with others by the same writer. When we do so, we see that he believed the life of man to have grown shorter step by step. For after Noah such high numbers as appear in the time before him are no longer mentioned, although in another family tree, similar to the one we are now speaking of, ages between two and six hundred years still occur;² whereas, in the time after Abraham, usually called the patriarchal age, no one lives to two hundred, though many still live to more than a hundred; but after Moses such high ages are no longer met with. Mankind—such is the lesson this Israelite wishes to teach us—have been growing gradually shorter lived. The idea that this was the consequence of sin is, indeed, supported by

¹ Jude *vv.* 14, 15.

² Genesis *xi.* 10—32.

another writer, who makes Yahweh decide even before the flood that his life-giving spirit shall not exercise its power in man for ever, and that his life shall not exceed one hundred and twenty years;¹ but the writer of the Book of Origins does not teach this doctrine. To have a long life, to drop into the grave "full of days," as they called it, was one of the most glorious gifts of God which an Israelite could imagine. When he painted a joyous future for his people, one of the features of the picture was that no sucking child should die nor any one who had not reached the full measure of his years; that if anyone died at a hundred he would be said to have perished in his youth; nay, that even a sinner, who was snatched away for his wickedness, would not die before his hundredth year.² So thought the writer of this family register. Like the poet of the story of paradise, he imagined that there had been a happier time in the past; and the principal feature of these golden days, he thought, was a long life. The same idea is found among many ancient peoples. Indeed, nothing is more natural, for it is a melancholy thought to all of us that we must die. In general we trouble ourselves very little about it, but from time to time we are reminded of the fact that we must die, in such a way that we cannot help thinking about it, and then the thought invariably gives rise to the most painful feelings. Though careless flippancy may try to put it off, and set aside all thoughts of the future with a laugh, yet whenever the certainty that we must sometime die does come before our eyes, it moves us deeply, and everyone who feels and thinks requires some comfort against the mournful thought that he is mortal.

We are made to live. But it does not follow that the wish to spend hundreds of years upon the earth would be a

¹ Genesis vi. 3, after an amended version.

² Isaiah lxx. 20.

wise one. Such a lengthened life would be full of sadness even if it were not impossible. We must acquiesce in our lot, therefore, and the more quietly and contentedly we do so, the better it will be for us. But, after all, we are created to live, and we may make our life long, even upon this earth, if we will.

It is true that we sometimes say, with a sigh, that life passes by like a dream; but it is a bad sign to make such complaints as this, for if a man sleeps away through a do-nothing life, it seems short when he looks back upon it; but if we work hard and think hard, then our life becomes full and rich, nay, it even seems long as we look back upon it, because so much has happened in it. Whole years of a dawdling or selfish or licentious life are worth less than a single day lived by an earnest, thoughtful, God-fearing man. So thought and felt a poet of Israel when he sang:¹

A day in thy courts is better than a thousand.

I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than dwell
in the tents of wickedness;

For a sun and shield is God;

Grace and glory are given by Yahweh;

No good will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.

O Yahweh of hosts! blessed is the man who trusteth in Thee!

What this psalmist said of abiding in the temple we repeat after him of walking with God. Blessed is the man who looks up to God, and abides with him. Let us not wish for a long life so much as for a holy and an active one; for this alone is truly *life*, and thus alone does the hope of life eternal spring up within our hearts.

¹ Psalm lxxxiv. 10-12.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FLOOD.

GEN. VI.—VIII.

AMONGST almost all ancient peoples we find a tradition that, when the world was buried in sins, a great flood destroyed it, with the exception of some few persons who escaped. The Chaldees, for example, told of a certain Xisuthros, the tenth and last ruler before the flood, to whom the highest god foretold that the beginning of the judgment would fall upon the fifteenth day of the month Daesius. On this he buried the written archives of ancient times in Sepharvaim,¹ the city of the sun, embarked with his relations and friends in a great ship, into which he took every kind of quadruped and of flying and creeping thing, together with the necessary food, and then sailed to Armenia. By letting birds fly out of the vessel he frequently tested the state of the earth. When these birds came back the second time they had mud on their feet, and when they flew out the third time they did not come back at all. Upon this Xisuthros, with his wife and the steersman, left the ship; but, in reward for their piety, they were suddenly carried up to the dwelling of the gods, and Xisuthros was only able to cry out from the air, to those who were left behind, that they must go back to Babylon and restore the books, which he had buried, to mankind; which accordingly they did.

A similar story is found among the Phrygians, who even mention Enoch's preaching and ascension in connection with it. The Syrians, Phœnicians, Persians, and Hindoos, all had stories of a flood, which agreed in some points with those

¹ See map 1.

of the Israelites, and differed from them in others. In the same way we find them among the European nations, too. In the Greek story it is Deucalion and Pyrrha who are spared on account of their piety; with the Celts and Germans the persons saved have other names; but everywhere we find some story of the sort. This fact, with others like it, points with the greatest likelihood, to a common fatherland, the cradle of these nations, from which they all came, taking these traditions with them. Perhaps this country was Armenia, in which the Israelite stories, as well as others, place us.

In the legends of which we have so far spoken, we have discovered the work of two writers, the first of whom speaks of the Supreme Being under the name of "God," and gave us the first account of the creation, and the family register of Adam down to Noah, while the second uses the name Yahweh, and gave us the story of paradise and the account of the Cainites. It is natural to ask, therefore, from which of these writers the story of the flood is derived; but it is not easy to answer the question. In the three chapters which contain this story there are two documents mixed up together, and though we can sometimes distinguish the style and the peculiar ideas of the former writers, it is at other times very hard to say whether we have either of the two before us, rather than some third writer. For the most part they quite agree with each other, and consequently the story is not free from repetitions, but here and there the accounts are unmistakably contradictory.

It is not necessary for our purpose to go into the question of the composition of the story any further. As far as it forms a single whole, I will retell it straight through, and then point out a few contradictions.

Here, then, is the story of the deluge or flood:—

When men began to multiply upon the earth, their wicked-

ness grew greater and greater. Among the other inhabitants of earth, there rose up giants, who had earthly mothers, but whose fathers were divine beings called sons of God; and these giants in their turn became the fathers of others. These were the heroes of the olden time. All the earth became godless. Violence was universal. All flesh—that is, man and beast—grew more and more rude and wild.

Then Yahweh, seeing that there was nothing but evil in mankind, repented that he had made them, and determined to destroy them, and all the beasts as well. Noah alone found favour with him, and he therefore commanded him to make an ark or chest. This vessel, built of resinous timber, and covered outside and in with pitch, was to be three hundred cubits long, fifty broad, and thirty high. It was to be divided into three storeys, and sub-divided into chambers, with an opening to let in light and air, and a door. God told him that he must prepare this vessel, because all living things upon the earth were to be destroyed; while he himself, his wife, his three sons—Shem, Ham, and Japhet—and their wives, were to seek refuge in this ark. Moreover, he was to take with him a pair of every kind of animal, a male and a female, besides the necessary food for man and beast.

This warning and the directions that accompanied it were given to Noah seven days before the flood began. He obeyed, and on the seventh day the flood of waters came. It was the six hundredth year of Noah's life, the seventeenth day of the second month. On this day all the flood-gates of the great ocean burst open, and it poured its streams over the earth. At the same time the windows of heaven were opened, and the waters collected above the firmament fell down upon the earth in torrents. Forty days long this deluge of rain went on. Everything that had life perished in the water. In vain did man and beast flee to the mountains. The water rose fifteen cubits above the topmost peak. But

Noah and his family were safe in the ark, and with them all the creatures, quadrupeds, reptiles, and birds, which had come in to them.

A hundred and fifty days had the water covered everything, when God bethought himself once more of Noah and his family. So he caused a strong wind to rise, and the waters began to abate. The fountains of the ocean and the windows of heaven were already closed. Little by little the water flowed away again, and upon the seventeenth day of the seventh month the ark settled upon one of the mountain peaks in the land of Ararat, and the peaks themselves became visible once more upon the eleventh day of the tenth month. Forty days later Noah opened the window and let out a raven, that went on flying backwards and forwards until the earth became dry again. After the raven he sent out a dove, to see whether the water had gone away yet ; but she could not find a resting place anywhere, for everything was covered with water still, so she came back to the ark and was taken in again. After waiting seven days, Noah let out a dove the second time, and towards evening she came back again with a leaf fresh broken from an olive tree in her beak. So Noah knew that the earth was delivered from the excess of water. After waiting another seven days, he once more let out a dove, but she did not return.

So in the six hundred and first year of his life, on the first day of the first month, when the earth was delivered from the water, Noah took off the covering that was over the ark. On the twenty-seventh day of the second month, the earth was quite dry. Then God said to Noah, "Come out of the ark, with your wife and children and all the animals. Let them spread themselves over the earth and people it once more." Noah obeyed, and when he had come out of the ark, he made a thank-offering to Yahweh.

Now when Yahweh smelt the odour of the sacrifice, he

thought: "I will never curse the earth again for the sake of men; for they are evil from their youth up. So, why should I ever destroy all living things again? No. Henceforth shall seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, follow each other undisturbed."

Many a brow has been bent over this story before now! Indeed, if we are to suppose that all the stories in the Bible are historically true, we shall find difficulties enough in the representation of this ark, in which all the animals—quadrupeds, reptiles, and birds—were kept alive for about a year; and it is not easy even to imagine a flood rising to fifteen cubits above the highest mountain-tops, even if we suppose (what the writer certainly did not intend) that it only covered that part of the earth which was inhabited at the time. Some people have given themselves an incredible amount of trouble about this story. One scholar has calculated how much space there was in the ark, and how many kinds of animals could be accommodated in it, allowing for a pair of each and the necessary food. An inhabitant of Hoorn, in Holland, actually built a ship in the year 1609, on the model of the ark, and found that a vessel so constructed was capable of bearing a specially heavy freight! No doubt it is a very creditable thing to spend labour and money in convincing ourselves of the truth of our opinions; but those who have tried to support the historical reliability of the story of the flood by these means have lost their labour; for they leave the principal difficulties where they were. How can we believe that Noah collected all these animals and the food they would require, in seven days? We must suppose that he did so, however, if we follow the account given us, for he was only warned one week beforehand.¹ Besides this,

¹ Gen. vii. 4, 10.

there is at least one contradiction to explain between the two accounts that are worked together. For one writer says that Noah was to take *one* pair of every kind of animal into the ark;¹ while the other writer makes a distinction between the clean and unclean animals, and makes Yahweh tell Noah to take one pair only of the unclean animals, but seven pair of the clean ones with him.² And so it is only this writer who can say that, after his deliverance, Noah made a sacrifice of all kinds of clean animals to Yahweh;³ if the other writer had done so he would have made him destroy his whole stock of cattle and all the edible birds.

We will not trouble ourselves to speak of all the difficulties of the story, taken as a true account of a fact. We will not even answer the question, what historical foundation there is for the story. There may have been many great floods, the memory of which was preserved, though we can hardly believe any of them ever rose above the peaks of Ararat. It is not unlikely that the foundation of all these legends of the flood is to be found in some myth, in which nature has become degenerate, as it were, in the winter, and is buried and for a time destroyed by the overflowing of a river in the spring, but wakes up afterwards to fresh life. At least it is remarkable that from the beginning of the flood to the day on which Noah leaves the ark, just about a year passes by; and also that most of the legends of the flood, amongst others that of the Israelites, take us to countries in which the rivers rise above their banks every year.

But whatever the source may have been from which our writers drew the old story, they clothed it according to their own ideas, and we can therefore learn from it what they thought of God and of his relation to mankind. From this point of view the story inspires us with no

¹ Gen. vi. 20.

² Gen. vii. 2, 3, 8, 9.

³ Gen. viii. 20.

great respect. On the contrary, its leading ideas are perverted and superstitious. Nay, the writer who uses the name Yahweh, to whom we owe the stories about paradise and the Cainites, actually repels us. For how does he make his god think and act with regard to man? Yahweh repents that he has made mankind. He is deeply grieved because there is nothing but evil in man.¹ Noah alone is an exception to the rule. So all created things, to which life has been given, are destroyed, except the men and beasts secured within the ark. But after the flood, when Yahweh smelt Noah's sacrifice, half pleased by the offering, half vexed to think of the futility of what he had just done, he said: "I will never destroy the earth again for the guilt of men, for they are bad from their very birth; so what is the use of my destroying them?"² Of whom is this Israelite writer speaking? As for his representing his Yahweh in the form of a man, we knew that he did that before, and all through the writings of the Israelites we come upon this anthropomorphism (representations of the Supreme Being under human forms) again and again. Even this we do not always find edifying, but, mindful of the fact that man can never form a true conception of deity or find adequate expressions in which to speak of it, we need not be distressed when anyone speaks of God's hand or foot, God's heart or eye, God's anger or love. We ourselves sometimes use expressions of this kind without the smallest hesitation; and therefore, even when we read that God smelt a sacrifice or that he repented of having made mankind, the necessity of using forms of speech concerning God, which are borrowed from the life of man, may be admitted as an excuse; although we know that "God is not a man, that he should repent."³ But in this story the whole

¹ Gen. vi. 1—8.² Gen. viii. 21, 22.³ Num. xxiii. 19.

conduct of Yahweh is unworthy. We should be offended by such behaviour in a man. To destroy his work because it had not turned out particularly well, and then to say dryly that he really need not have done so, for after all the result will never be any better—such conduct would not speak very well for the character of a man, and yet it is ascribed by this writer to his god! Surely a writer who can make such representations, can have no very exalted conception of his god.

The other narrator, the writer of the Book of Origins, gives us no such unworthy representations of God's work either in this story or in the first account of the creation, or in Adam's family register. In those parts of the story which come from his hand, however, we find what appears to us a very extraordinary idea, though there was nothing strange about it to the Israelites. The readers of the story, as given above, will probably have noticed with surprise that the moral corruption spoken of was not confined to mankind, but was to be seen in the animal world as well. This is the real meaning of the expression that "all flesh," that is man and beast, shall be destroyed, "because they have filled the earth with violence, and have corrupted their ways before God."¹ What, then! Does our writer believe that the animals too have a share in the knowledge of good and evil? Can *they* be spoken of as guilty?—We shall see by a subsequent story that this idea was not altogether foreign to the Israelites, and we need not say any more about it at present, therefore; but it is pretty clear what the writer meant by the change which had come over the animal world, calling for punishment, together with the sins of man, by the great deluge. In his account of the creation, he told us that God had given all the beasts of the field, all the birds, all the creeping

¹ Gen. vi. 11 –13.

things, everything in fact that has life, the grass for food.¹ When he complains, therefore, of the violence of which all flesh had become guilty, what else can he mean but that some animals had become carnivorous (flesh eating)? This lamentation agrees most remarkably with the expectation of the prophet Isaiah, that, when the golden age of the future dawned, the beasts of prey would forget their savage nature, the wolf would dwell with the lamb, and the lion would eat hay like the ox.²

But, however great the difference may be in the special views of the two authors, whose work is combined in the story of the flood, the leading thought of both is the same, namely, that God punished the sins of the world by a flood. We must dwell upon this matter at some length, for in every part of the Old Testament we shall find the idea that God punishes men for their unrighteousness by disasters which are not the natural consequences of their sins, but are only attached to them as penalties by God's good pleasure. Once for all, we must stamp this idea as superstitious; and how injurious to true piety and pure morality this superstition is, we shall have many opportunities of remarking in the course of our work.

The belief that every disaster was a declaration of God's displeasure might very easily arise in ancient times, when the mutual connection and the causes of the phenomena of nature were unknown, and the immediate activity of some deity and the revelation of his will was seen in everything. Then, as we saw in the story of Cain, it might be imagined that the earth refused to yield her fruit to one who had murdered his brother, so that he would plough and sow in vain. Then, as the same story teaches us, the phenomena of nature might be regarded as warnings and as omens.

¹ Gen. i. 29.

² Isaiah xi. 6-9.

Then, a revelation of the wrath of the deity might be found in every failure of the crops through drought or any other misfortune, in every storm that stranded vessels and overturned dwellings, in every fever, in every disaster, and in everything which was not understood but had a threatening aspect, such as an eclipse of the sun or the appearance of a comet; while pleasant sunshine, balmy showers, recovery from sickness, in a word all that was favourable and pleasant to man, was taken as a proof that the Supreme Being was well disposed towards him. No one can seriously hold this opinion now. We have learned the causes of many of the phenomena of nature, and therefore see no signs of God's pleasure or displeasure in them; for now that we can imitate the lightning on a small scale by the electrical machine, and can guide it by conductors where we will; now that we can draw up storm-charts and can predict successfully the direction and the strength of the wind a day beforehand, by the *aëroclinoscope*; now that we have discovered means of preventing or curing so many diseases, and arm ourselves against smallpox by vaccination, or extinguish pain by chloroform; now that the science of agriculture has placed so many means in our hands of making the earth more fruitful; now that the invention of the locomotive and the steamboat is making famine ever more rare, by making it easier to bring the necessaries of life from one place to another; in such times as these, it will not do to look for a sign of God's displeasure in the misfortunes of which we know the causes, and which we have therefore found the means of resisting; and it is mere folly for a man to consider himself particularly virtuous and a darling child of providence, because he enjoys exceptional prosperity.

The belief that God's anger and his pleasure are revealed in events which are propitious or the reverse to us, was the result of the primitive nature-worship, in which the deity was

identified with visible objects or with powers of nature, a form of worship from which the Israelite began to shake himself free when he uttered his belief that God made heaven and earth, but from the influence of which he was never able altogether to withdraw himself, any more than many of those who live in our own times can do so now.

The leading idea of the story of the flood is therefore wrong, and so we cannot give any high position to the legend itself.

And yet the story is a very striking picture of what God, the almighty ruler, is ever doing. Whole worlds are brought to destruction by him. Egypt was once the seat of a mighty kingdom, in which art and science flourished. What is there left of it? Pyramids and obelisks, sphinxes and ruins, call up the past before the mind of the inquirer; but where is Egyptian society? Gone! Babylon and Nineveh were once the centres of the whole world, where men thought and worked and strove. And now their remains, which the sands of the desert have kept buried ages long, are being laboriously dug out, and are telling us of a past that has gone by so utterly, that it was long supposed to have vanished and left no trace behind. Where is the ancient world of Rome and Greece? The relics it has left behind are many, but it has passed away itself. And so we may see even now that the very centres of human life are sometimes swept away as by a flood.

Why is this? Why have the ancient worlds, with all their culture and development, passed away? Is it because they had fallen out of the march of progress and had sunk into corruption? Is it because they had forgotten God? We cannot boldly answer these questions in the affirmative, or ascribe the destruction of these worlds to their sins alone; for so many things work together to bring about the fall of a

nation, and among these causes there are many which have no connection with its moral condition. But, whatever it may be to which we ascribe these great events, it seems as if God were always doing his work over again. He builds up and then casts down again, to raise a new world upon the ruins of the old.

And this is certain, that where men have forgotten God; where culture and the sense of artistic beauty are not accompanied by moral elevation, but only serve to give empire to refined forms of sin; there sooner or later the varnish is rubbed off, and the mouldering structure is revealed; there thrones are overturned and peoples humbled; there the old order of things is swept away to make room for something better; and so a stern sentence, a judgment of God, goes out over the world.

Most men think but little of all this. They trifle away the hours, "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage,"¹ till the day of reckoning comes. They say, in deeds if not in words, "It will last our time! We shall be gone when the deluge comes!" Until the deluge really comes.

There are but few who believe in the judgment of God, and while the world around them takes no notice of it and disguises every danger, they see it drawing nigh. They are, like Enoch and Noah, the preachers of righteousness,² and when they are disbelieved, they build, for themselves and for those of kindred spirit, the ark of the inner life with God, and there they are delivered from the judgment.

¹ Luke xvii. 27.

² 2 Peter ii. 5, Jude vv. 14, 15.

CHAPTER VII.

GOD'S COVENANT WITH NOAH.

GEN. IX. 1—17.

THE subject of this chapter is connected immediately with that of the last, for it is itself a part of the story of the flood. We have seen how the writer who uses Yahweh as the name of his god, and distinguishes between clean and unclean animals, makes Noah offer a sacrifice to Yahweh as soon as he has come out of the ark, upon which Yahweh determines never again to destroy the world. Now the other narrator, the author of the Book of Origins, knows nothing of this sacrifice, but makes God bless Noah and his family, as soon as they have left the ark, on which occasion he gives them certain commandments to observe, together with a promise of his favour accompanied by a certain sign. Both the commandments and the sign are of sufficient importance to deserve special attention.

When God blessed Noah and his sons, he said, as he had done when first he created man,¹ "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. All beasts of the field and all birds shall be in fear and dread of you, and all creeping things and all fishes shall be in your power." All this had been so from the beginning, for even then man had received dominion over the animal world; but violence having become so common both amongst men and beasts, this lordship was no longer to be peacefully acknowledged, but was to rest upon the fear of man entertained by the animals; and since some of them had become carnivorous, they were henceforth to stand in a different relation to man as well as to each other; for whereas grains and herbs

¹ Genesis i. 28.

merely had been given him as food at the creation, he was henceforth to be allowed to eat flesh as well. God gave him permission to do so in these words:—"Everything in which there is a living soul shall be food for you. I have given it you as I have given you the grains." One limitation only man must be content to accept. He must not eat flesh in which there was still life, that is blood.

Two points in this story call for our attention. In the first place the writer does not make the smallest distinction between clean and unclean animals; but we cannot be sure from this that the distinction was not known to him. All we can say is that he did not suppose the custom of abstaining from the flesh of certain animals to be so ancient as the other writer thought it, when he made Noah save seven pair of the clean animals, and only one pair of the unclean.

The distinction between clean and unclean animals appears to us a very curious one, in many respects. No doubt we too are accustomed to avoid using the flesh of some animals for food, though it is very suitable for the purpose—horse-flesh for instance. But we should never think of making it a religious duty to refrain from it. To do so, however, was quite in the spirit of antiquity, for then all kinds of things, that seem to us to have no sort of connection with religion, were commanded in God's name. The origin of the distinction between clean and unclean animals in Israel is not known with certainty. The rule¹ given out by the priests was that no quadrupeds might be eaten except those that had a properly cloven hoof and chewed the cud; and only those fishes that had fins and scales, which would exclude the lamprey and the eel, for example, as well as oysters and all shellfish; while certain kinds of birds mentioned by

¹ Deuteronomy xiv. 4—20, Leviticus xi. 1—31.

name and all creeping things (among which the weasel, the mouse, the tortoise, the hedgehog, the crocodile, the toad, and the mole, were reckoned) were unclean. There are certain differences in the law in the two versions in which it appears. For instance, the locust is said in Leviticus to be clean, but in Deuteronomy unclean. The law of Deuteronomy is the earliest, and dates, as has been said,¹ from the last century before the captivity. All attempts to find definite reasons for which the Israelites pronounced some kinds of animals clean and others unclean, have been unsuccessful. It seems that some of the unclean animals inspired them with a feeling of disgust, that they considered others, rightly or wrongly, to be unwholesome, and that others again accidentally gave them the impression of being unclean. Thus habit gradually established the distinction, until the priests confirmed it by attaching a religious meaning to it, and commanding its observance as a religious duty. Though some of the Israelites believed this law to be as ancient as the human race, our writer knew quite well that it was of comparatively recent date, and so he made God give Noah all kinds of animals for food.

We must next consider the prohibition: "You must not eat the flesh with its soul, that is its blood." This commandment is often repeated in the religious laws of the Israelites,² and on one occasion the blood of all four-footed beasts and all birds³ is expressly mentioned, while that of fishes is not spoken of. During the six centuries that passed between the time when this prohibition was made a part of the Law, and the founding of Christianity, it had taken such

¹ See p. 31.

² Deuteronomy xii. 16, 23, 24; xv. 23; Leviticus iii. 17; vii. 26, 27; xvii. 10—14; xix. 26.

³ Leviticus vii. 26.

deep root in the Jewish mind, that the question as to eating blood, and meat with the blood in it, was one of the most important differences which stood in the way of the union of Christians who had been Jews with those who had been heathens.¹ It is well known, too, how strictly the Jews of our own time still observe this rule, as well as the other laws about what may be eaten. In order that the blood may flow off properly when animals are killed for food, the slaughtering is not left to anyone who happens to consider himself fit for the occupation, but the Jew butchers have to call in the "master" to kill their meat. This master must have passed an examination in his art, and is called to a community as butcher (*shochet*). The knife that he uses for his work must always be examined, and passed by a rabbi. Not only must it be sharp and two-edged, but there must not be the smallest notch on it, both to avoid giving the animal any unnecessary pain, and to allow the blood to flow off without the smallest obstacle. Want of skill in sharpening the knife makes a Jewish master worthless, and a few slips in this particular soon cause him to be deposed.

We do not find the same horror of the use of blood among all ancient peoples, for in making treaties it was by no means uncommon to drink the blood of the sacrifice, and in our own times even, travellers tell us of uncivilised nations, such as the Abessinians, who, when hungry, sometimes cut pieces of flesh out of living cattle and eat them, all hot and bleeding, as a dainty. Even the ancient Israelites did not always refrain from this practice, but they allowed themselves to be dissuaded from it, and did not really approve of it.² Now in our story an explanation is given of the commandment not to eat blood, which helps us to understand the ancient modes of thought; for not only men, but animals also,

¹ Acts xv. 20, 29.

² 1 Samuel xiv. 32 ff. After an amended version.

were thought of as having souls. Killing an animal therefore is called "smiting the soul of an animal;"¹ and since they believed that every animal had a soul, they felt a kind of reverence towards it. This belief explains many of the customs of uncivilised peoples of ancient and modern times, for instance their dislike of pronouncing the name of any beast of which they are afraid; the practice, when they have hunted and killed an animal, of asking it to forgive them, and even pacifying it with sacrifices; and the worship addressed to all sorts of animals. It was very natural for people to think that the soul was connected with the blood; for when the blood of man or beast was shed the breathing ceased, and the life departed, and the obvious inference was that the blood was the seat of the principle of life, that is the soul. It was this idea, too, that led the Israelites to refrain from using the blood of animals for food, until at last the Law commanded this abstinence in the name of God. After that it passed into a commandment that everyone observed mechanically, without troubling himself about the grounds on which it rested.

These remarks have interrupted us in the middle of our account of what God said to Noah and his family; but that which follows stands in close connection with the subjects of which we have just spoken. As far as it concerns the commandments, the whole speech runs as follows: "Be fruitful and fill the earth. Fear of you shall come upon all the animals. You have power over them. You are even free henceforth to eat the flesh of all that has life, as well as grains and herbs, as long as you do not eat the blood, for the soul of the animal is in it. On the other hand, to protect your soul (or your life) I shall demand your blood from any one who sheds it. Whether it be a beast or one of your

¹ Leviticus xxiv. 18. After an amended version.

fellow-men, he must pay back the soul of a man which he has taken away. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man after his likeness. And as for you, increase and fill the earth."

In opposition, then, to the blood of animals, which might be shed without fear, the blood of man was holy and inviolable. Murder, therefore, was punished in the Israelite laws by death,¹ not because of the extreme wickedness of the man who robbed his neighbour of life, but simply because compensation must be paid for the soul that had been destroyed. And this is why it made no difference whether a man had killed another on purpose or by accident. In either case he had forfeited his life. Even an animal, that had killed a man, must be stoned.²

This last practice appears very absurd to us ; but it was not confined to a high antiquity. In Christian countries, and even in Western Europe, many an animal has been brought to justice at the hands of the hangman, for killing a man. As late as in 1486, the hangman of Yprès, in Flanders, was ordered to execute a boar upon the scaffold, because it had killed a child.

So if a man had killed anyone, on purpose or by accident, he had forfeited his own life. The blood that had been shed cried out for a recompense, and it was the duty of the nearest relative to demand the debt by slaying the murderer. For this reason he was called the *blood-redeemer*, for the Hebrew word must be so translated, not *blood-avenger*. The redeemer was not only allowed but obliged to destroy the murderer. He was not allowed to follow the practice of other nations, sometimes adopted doubtless in Israel too, and accept a ransom in money. To do so was a sin ; for when blood was shed it defiled the land, and the stain could only be washed

¹ Exodus xxi. 12 ; Leviticus xxiv. 17, 21, 22.

² Exodus xxi. 28—32.

out by the blood of the murderer;¹ for man was made after the image of God, and was therefore inviolable. The god of Israel was a stern god, and no one who marred his likeness could escape his punishment.

The difference, however, between a man who had killed his neighbour intentionally and one who had accidentally caused the death of some one—possibly his dearest friend—was so obvious that a natural feeling of fairness required some softening of this stern law. There were certain places of refuge, therefore. In the earliest times this privilege belonged to the temples, and the altar especially protected the murderer. Afterwards, when the number of sanctuaries was limited, there were certain cities of refuge in which anyone who had killed a man, without any guilt on his own part, might sojourn. But if anyone had committed a murder out of hatred, it was no use his escaping to one of these cities, for he was given up to the blood-redeemer, and was killed by him. His life was protected only if he was guiltless, and in that case he might go back in safety to his own home, on the death of the high-priest.²

The expression: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, because he is made after the image of God," is frequently quoted in defence of capital punishment as the legal penalty for murder. Of course, if we are to frame our penal code after the model of that of Israel, this is all fair; but in that case we are bound to execute any animal that has killed a man; for if we recognise a certain commandment as divine, and therefore binding upon us as well as those to whom it was given, we have no right to observe one half of it and throw the other half to the winds. But this is the way in which the words of the Bible are abused. However useful the law that the murderer

¹ Numbers xxxv. 31—34.

² Deuteronomy xix. 1—13; Numbers xxxv. 9—34.

must be punished by death may have been in ancient times, it must not be accepted and observed as a divine law by us.

The later Rabbis increased the commandments about abstaining from blood and the inviolability of human life to the number of seven. To these they added : obedience to the authorities, and prohibition of blasphemy, idolatry, incest, and theft. They called these the Noachic commandments, and considered that everyone, whether Jew or heathen, was bound to observe them, inasmuch as they had been issued before the promulgation of the Mosaic law. For this reason they were imposed upon the so-called "proselytes of the gate," that is, the heathens who had half gone over to Judaism. All this, however, only dates from a period centuries later than the Babylonian captivity.

Such was man's side of the covenant, and God, on his part, promised that he would never send a flood of waters upon the earth again. As a token of this covenant he made the rainbow that, whenever he gathered the clouds together over the earth, it might appear to remind him of his promise, which was to hold good for ever.

It is not surprising that so splendid a phenomenon as the rainbow made a deep impression upon the peoples of antiquity. The cause of its appearance was not in the least degree understood, but it was observed that it was connected in some way with the rain. This gave rise to all sorts of speculations, and the rainbow, consequently, plays a part in the mythologies of many nations. It is often called the bridge by which the gods come down from heaven to earth, or by which the souls of the departed reach the abode of bliss. This idea is not found among the Israelites. In our story the "bow of God" is the sign of the covenant; but that does not mean that it was intended to reassure mankind.

According to the Israelites, the rainbow no more served this purpose than did the sign of which Yahweh spoke to Cain; but just as the latter was meant to warn anyone who was about to raise his hand against Cain or the Cainites,¹ so the former was meant to remind God of his promise. What childlike ideas of God people had in ancient times! As if the memory of the deity needed to be refreshed in this way.

In their expectations as to the future, then, the two authors who tell us about the flood are quite agreed. They do not expect that such an all-destroying flood will ever come upon the earth again; but they cherish this belief upon very different grounds; or rather, they ascribe very different motives to their God in giving this promise. According to the one, God's motive is humiliating enough to man: viz., that he is really incorrigible; while the other rises to a higher point of view, and ascribes to God good-will towards all that lives, both man and beast; while the life of man, who is made after his image, is inviolable. In this he approaches to some extent the position of Jesus, who dared to call God Father, and revered in man, in spite of all his shortcomings and all his want of holiness, the child of God.

After the story of the flood comes that of Noah's drunkenness and his cursing Canaan. It is from the same hand as the account of the flood in which the name of Yahweh is used, the distinction between clean and unclean animals made, and the sacrifice of Noah mentioned. We shall speak of it afterwards in another connection.

¹ See pp. 68, 74.

CHAPTER VIII.

NIMROD.

GEN. X. 8—12.

IN the mountains of Armenia, there rise, not far from each other, two great rivers, the Euphrates and the Tigris. The Euphrates, which rises north of the other, takes a wide sweep to the west, round the mountains of Armenia, while the Tigris flows south-east from the first. Then they both flow through a plain, a considerable height above the level of the sea, some parts of which, especially near the banks of the rivers, are moderately fertile, though the rest of the territory between the two streams is dry and barren. This region was called by the Greeks Mesopotamia, that is, the country between the rivers. This district, together with that to the east of the Tigris, was formerly inhabited by the Assyrians, whose capital, Nineveh, was situated on the left bank of this river. On issuing from this region the two rivers approach pretty close together and then part again; and so, sometimes nearer and sometimes further from each other, flow on in the same direction until they pour themselves into the Persian Gulf. A fruitful plain stretches down from the place where the two streams approach each other most closely. It is called the plain of Shinear, that is, again, “of the two rivers,” and was inhabited by the Babylonians.¹

From the eighth century before Christ onwards the Israelites came into very close contact with both Assyrians and Babylonians; and it is not surprising, therefore, that they felt an interest in the earliest history of their countries.

The following account is given us by one of them:—

Nimrod, the Ethiopian, was the first tyrant upon earth.

¹ See map 1.

He was a mighty hunter before the face of Yahweh; and that is the origin of the proverbial expression: "A hunter like Nimrod before Yahweh." He ruled at first over Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinear. Then he went to Assyria, and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and Resen, which is situated between Nineveh and Calah,—this is the great city.

What is told us of Nimrod in this passage does not give us a very favourable impression of him, and we cannot be surprised that the later Jewish writers draw a portrait which is anything but flattering of this first tyrant and mighty hunter. One of them (Flavius Josephus¹) combines the story of the tower of Babel with this notice of Nimrod, and represents him as having tried to carry heaven by storm, and as having been slain by the wrath of God in punishment for his audacity. All this, however, is quite contrary to the intention of the old story, in which nothing is told to the discredit but everything to the honour of Nimrod, and he is represented as one of the benefactors of mankind. There is certainly nothing noble in hunting or shooting defenceless game, either for pleasure or profit, in our day; but to understand the story of Nimrod we must imagine a country thinly inhabited and swarming with beasts of prey, with wolves, lions, tigers, eagles, and serpents. In such a country a powerful and valiant hunter who risks his life in protecting men and cattle, is beloved by everyone. It is but natural, too, that such a man, renowned for his strength and skill, honoured for his courage and the benefits he confers, proud of the power his arms have won for him, and accustomed to brave every danger, should be the leader of his tribesmen in war and the umpire of their disputes in times of peace, and so gradually become their acknowledged ruler. And though a power which rests on the sword is not our ideal, yet even this

¹ On Josephus, see Vol. V., Introduction viii.

was a blessing in ancient times ; for the political institutions of our day were unknown ; and unless there were some one to preserve order by force and by the fear which his person inspired, a whole district might easily fall a prey to strife and disorder. Hence establishing a personal rule was a step in the path of progress and increased civilisation. All the influential princes of antiquity were tyrants, mighty hunters in time of peace, and warriors when threatened by the enemy ; and the sagas of the most different nations attribute the slaughtering of monsters and giants to their gods and demigods. Such were the deeds of the god Thor in the belief of our forefathers ; and of Orion and Herakles (Hercules) according to the Greeks. I do not mean to assert that there really were men who bore these names, and that after their death they were worshipped as gods ; but by ascribing such exploits to their gods, the ancients showed how much they thought of them, and how highly mighty hunters and tyrants were honoured.

Now we understand how Nimrod could be called a mighty hunter “before the face of Yahweh ;” for this expression does not mean, as is sometimes said, a hunter who was rebellious against Yahweh, but a hunter upon whom Yahweh looked, that is, whom he appointed to struggle mightily, and to prepare the way for civilisation and progress in the countries over which he ruled.

The name of Nimrod has not as yet been discovered upon the ancient monuments of Babylon and Assyria ; nor can we even explain its meaning with any certainty. We are, therefore, quite unable to tell whether it was originally the name of a god, a tribe, or a man ; but in any case Nimrod is one of those mythical beings in whose fortunes and exploits the history of a country is recorded.

Now let us read the account once more : Cush, that is Ethiopia, gave Nimrod being. He was the first tyrant on

earth. A mighty hunter before Yahweh, he ruled at first over the four cities or districts of the plain of Shinear, and then extended his dominion over the four great Assyrian cities which make up all together what is called "the great city," for this seems to be the true meaning of the last words of the passage. The meaning of the story is this: The first settled state ever founded upon earth must be looked for in Babylonia. This kingdom was of Ethiopian origin, inasmuch as it was founded by a tribe that had migrated from Ethiopia. Babel and the three other places mentioned were its principal cities. In the course of time the Babylonian civilisation spread over Assyria, and thither the seat of empire over Asia was afterwards removed.

This story agrees with what the Greek traditions tell us of migrations of the Ethiopians to the plain of Shinear, in primeval times, and their expeditions from this country northward; and the spread of the Babylonian civilisation over Assyria is painted in rich and varied colours in all the legends of Semiramis which we find in the writings of the Greeks. This warlike and yet voluptuous princess was said to have been married first to Oannes and then to Ninus. After this second marriage, and especially after the death of her husband, she conquered half the world, but was defeated at last by the Indians, and then carried up to heaven, or, according to others, murdered by her son. To her the legends ascribed not only all the conquests of the Assyrians, but also all the magnificent buildings both in Assyria and in Babylonia. Now the word Semiramis means "the high-exalted name," and is the appellation of a goddess. Oannes is the name of the god who civilised the Babylonians, according to old Chaldean myths; Ninus is a personification of the Assyrian people. The meaning of the legend, therefore, is as follows: After the rude and warlike people of Assyria

had come into contact with the culture and religion of Babylon, and the seat of empire had passed from Babel to Nineveh, the Assyrians came forward as the conquerors of the world, and not only made conquests on every side, but also left traces of their influence in countless monuments.

The researches of later times have confirmed what these legends teach us. An incredible amount of labour has been expended upon the examination of a number of Babylonian and Assyrian ruins; and many scholars, of whom Botta, Place, Layard, Rawlinson, Oppert, and recently Schrader, are the best known, have devoted their powers to the difficult task of deciphering the inscriptions which have been found in great numbers. Much obscurity still hangs round this ancient history, but some facts at least have been disclosed; and so far they agree with what the legends tell us.

The scholars who are engaged in these studies think it probable that the population of Babylonia and Assyria was made up of two different races, and that the original inhabitants were subjugated by an Ethiopian immigration, whose language gained the supremacy over theirs. Perhaps the Chaldees, a tribe of priests in Babylonia, after whom the whole nation is commonly called that of the Chaldees, were the remains of these ancient inhabitants. About the year 2300, the kingdom of Nimrod, as we might call the old Chaldean monarchy, according to the story in Genesis x., was already established in the plain of Shinear. The chief god was the same Oannes with whom we met in the legends of Semiramis. Amongst the other gods, of whom we shall have more to say hereafter, were Bel, Mylitta, and Dagan, and their worship was often of a very immoral character. In the eighteenth century before Christ, the old Chaldean monarchy had fallen into decay, and in the seventeenth it was conquered by the Egyptians, under whose supremacy Assyria gradually arose, until its monarchs, during the same

period as that in which the Israelites came out of Egypt, made themselves masters of Babel, and ruled the whole "land of the two rivers" from Nineveh. Thus "Nimrod went to Assyria." We shall come upon this Assyrian empire again in the course of the history of the Israelites, and shall see how great an influence it exercised upon them, both by its religion and its arms.

Once more let the figure of Nimrod rise before us, as it is here described. He is not an attractive figure—this mighty hunter, this despotic ruler! Conscious strength and courage are seated on his brow. He rescues the flock from the claws of the dreaded lion. He enables the industrious to cultivate their land, and equip their fishing boats in peace. He promulgates laws and preserves order. Woe to the man who seizes his neighbour's wife or who slays his brother! The ruler's grasp is upon him, he has hurled him to the ground, he has struck him dead! Woe to the man who attacks him himself! He leaves no injury unavenged. It needs but little provocation to make him slay the offender. So a heavy price is paid for safety, since freedom is thrown into fetters. The rule of the wild beasts is changed for that of a man, and a man may be more terrible than a wild beast, in his rage.

But the maintenance of order and justice, even after a rude fashion, paves the way to development in every direction. It is the first step towards the formation of a healthy society; and the second step is soon made by the people, and this is followed by others yet. Let no one despise the day of small things! Nimrod, a tyrant and a mighty hunter! Yes, but before Yahweh's face. God, who created all that is good, makes use even of tyrants to realise his ends. They may be the forerunners of better and gentler times.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TOWER OF BABEL.

GEN. XI. 1-9.

ON the western bank of the Euphrates, a little to the south of Babylon proper, on the spot marked Borsippa on our map, the traveller may still see a mighty ruin which rears itself above the naked plain around, and serves as a land-mark to the wandering shepherds. It is the basis, one hundred and ninety-eight feet in height, of a colossal building, a small part of the first story of which still crowns it. This ruin is known amongst the people of the country as "the mountain of Nimrod." It is all that remains of the Temple of Bel, formerly one of the most enormous buildings of the magnificent Babylon. Ancient writers vie with each other in describing its glories. It was a four-cornered building of baked clay bricks cemented with asphalt, in which the surrounding plain is very rich. This gigantic basis measured a hundred and fifty yards each way; and a tower rose from it in eight stories, each smaller than the one below it, to a height that far exceeded that of the great Egyptian pyramids. The building was for the most part solid right through, and a sloping passage that swept in wide circles round it conducted those who desired to ascend the tower, to its upper portions. In the top story, however, there was a chamber where stood a golden altar, and a bed prepared for the god Bel. In the bottom story, too, there was a chamber, in which was a golden image of the same or another god in a sitting posture, with a throne and foot-stool also made of gold. Before this image stood an altar upon which, when the yearly feast of Bel came round, thousands of pounds of incense were consumed. The idea of the architects in raising the temple of their god to such an enormous height, and

preparing a residence for him at its summit, appears to have been that Bel only visited the high places of the earth, and could therefore stay upon the cool heights of this artificial mountain, but not in the warmer air at its foot.

As soon as the Israelites had any communications with Babel, as they certainly had in the time of Hezekiah, and probably still earlier, they would of course become acquainted, amongst other things, with this colossal building. As usual, they gave free play to their imagination in connection with it, and clothed their ideas on the subject in the form of a narrative. One of them borrowed the material for his story, to some extent, from the name Babel, which seems really to mean "god's gate," but which he translated "confusion." The following legend accordingly came into existence.

In primeval times people all spoke the same language; and were therefore able to live together. Accordingly they all went from the land of Ararat towards the east, and so came to the plain of Shinear. When they had settled there they discovered the art of baking clay into bricks, and using asphalt for cement. Delighted with their discovery, they said to one another, "Come! Let us build a city, and a tower, the top of which shall reach to heaven! So will our fame be known, and we shall not be scattered all over the earth." Then they set to work at once. But Yahweh came down from heaven to see what this city and tower really were, that mankind was so busy building, and when he had seen what they were doing, he said, "See now! All mankind are but one nation, and they all speak the same language. This is only the beginning of what they will undertake; and unless a stop is put to it, it will be impossible to keep them back, in future, from anything they take it into their heads to do. Come, then! let us go down and throw their language into confusion, that they may no longer understand each other!" So Yahweh scattered them thence over all the earth,

and they stopped building the city; and it received the name of Babel (confusion), because it was there that Yahweh had confused the languages of men, and scattered them over the earth.

The chief point in this story is the writer's explanation of the difference between the languages of the various peoples. The subject is certainly well worth thinking about, and endeavouring to understand. "How is it," we ask, "that we speak English, and our neighbours German, French, or Dutch? How is it that such an enormous number of languages are spoken in different parts of the world? How are we to explain the fact that the natives of every part of the same country even, and we might almost say of every town or village, speak different dialects, so that their pronunciation or way of speaking often shows us where they come from?" The students of the science of philology are attempting to answer these questions, and many others on the same subject, and they have already bestowed a vast amount of labour upon them. This science, like so many others, has made rapid progress during the last half century, and such scholars as Grimm, Bopp, Rénan, and Max Müller, only to mention a few of the greatest, have already done much towards bringing this mysterious question somewhat nearer a solution. It is an excessively complicated subject, and scholars are not yet agreed even upon some of the fundamental points. For instance, while some believe that one original language lies at the root of all the languages of the world, or at all events that several hundred roots of words are common to them all, there are others who declare that languages having nothing in common with each other have risen among the various races of men.

The most interesting question of all, that, namely, of the origin of language in general, is as yet entirely unanswered,

just as the origin of religion, the history of which has many points of similarity with that of language, still escapes our observation.

The want on the part of men of some means of communicating their feelings and thoughts to each other compelled them to express what was going on within them by sounds ; and the more highly they became developed, the more knowledge of all kinds they gained, the more they thought about everything they saw, and the more they had to say to each other in consequence, the better they succeeded in indicating special objects, by clearly articulated sounds and then in reproducing ideas, while they declined words and formed sentences, until gradually a language had come into existence.

But all the human race did not live together, as they parted from each other for all kinds of reasons,—to find food for instance,—and so lived and settled in different districts. There they became acquainted with various products and phenomena of nature, and had their own special experiences and sensations to express. Their way of life, the degree and nature of their civilisation, and a hundred other circumstances, exercised an influence upon the form and the inflections of their words, and the construction of their sentences. The climate and the nature of the soil especially produced great alterations ; until at last their language grew into something quite different from what it had been at first ; just as is always happening even now.

For every language keeps gradually altering, until at last it can hardly be recognised as the same, and seems to have been succeeded by an entirely new one, and people begin to call the old way of speaking a “dead language.” Among civilised nations, this change only goes on very slowly, because they preserve their words in writing ; but the languages of uncivilised peoples are subject to very rapid change. There

are regions in which an almost entirely new language grows up within the period of one generation, and where every village and hamlet has one of its own, quite different from the rest, made to meet the requirements of the moment, and destined after a time to be forgotten again.

The difference between the languages and dialects of nations, then, is the result of difference in their origin, abode, history, character, and modes of thought and life; so that we can often make out more or less of their past history from their language. In particular it shows us in what relations they stood to each other in former times. Those nations whose forefathers lived together for a long time after they had reached a certain stage of development, and had therefore a more or less considerable number of words, express themselves by similar sounds, modified however by the circumstances in which they have since lived. Those, on the other hand, whose forefathers parted at an earlier period do not show any such resemblance.

The science that deals with the origin, the history, and the mutual connection of the various languages is called comparative philology. The Israelite who wrote the legend of the tower of Babel had no idea of such a science. He tried to explain what seemed to him a strange phenomenon, not by finding out its natural causes, but by ascribing it to an immediate dispensation of Yahweh, who intended it to prevent men from living together any more. In doing so, however, he represents what really was one of the causes of the difference between the languages as its effect.

We may be sure that this impression of the tower of Babel was not shared by all the Israelites. Most of them, no doubt, like the Babylonians themselves, were dazzled by the magnificence of the building and its gigantic size; for in every age people have admired great works and all else that

is dazzling. If, as appears from the story, the tower of Bel was not finished in the time of our writer, many of his contemporaries no doubt found this circumstance tantalising and vexatious enough, and longed to be able to see the work completed. Quite another spirit, however, inspires the composer of our story. He takes no delight in thinking of the skill of the men who discovered the materials for such a building, or their perseverance in going on with such a work, or the sacrifices they made to prepare what they thought a suitable abode for their god. All he sees in it is a work of vain glory, the first step on the fatal road, the beginning of an attempt to storm the very heaven, the result of a mad audacity, which Yahweh did well to put under due restraint, or there was no saying what would have been attempted next!

In this story we recognise the hand of the same writer who made Yahweh express a fear, in the story of paradise, that man might become immortal, who declares the desire of knowledge to be a sin, and is afraid of nothing so much as of presumption.¹

There is a Greek myth that breathes the same spirit, according to which the gods decreed that men should speak different languages, because they desired immortality and perpetual youth. "Divide and rule" was thus the motto of the gods, that they might hold the reins of power in their hands; while man's duty above all things was to submit to them, and not to aim at too high a position. There are other stories of Greek as well as Eastern origin, that speak of the fear entertained by the gods of the presumption of man. So the Greeks tell how when mankind, after having lived a life of purity at first, had gradually become corrupt, and impiety had gained the upper hand on earth, heaven itself was no longer safe against the passions of mankind;

¹ See pp. 63 ff.

for there rose a race of giants who attempted to storm the dwelling of the gods, and piled the mountains one upon another to enable them to climb up to the vault of heaven. But Zeus (Jupiter), the highest of the gods, smote the heap of mountains with his thunder-bolt, and buried those who were beseiging the seat of the gods under the fragments of the mass.

However one-sided this view of life may be, yet the warning it conveys is well worth laying to heart, and the "mountain of Nimrod" has still a precious lesson for us. For the proudest schemes are often framed by men, and even partly carried out. Love of glory has always played a great part in them, as our Israelite writer clearly saw. Mighty empires are founded. To unite the whole human race as far as possible under one sceptre, and range it round one central point, has been the constant effort, age after age, of princes and of peoples. And it is so still. The United States of North America, Russia, and Germany are the giant states of our day. A thoughtful observer is often alarmed by the projects of the most powerful princes and peoples; for sometimes it seems as if nothing were impossible to them, as if the fate of the whole world lay in their hands. But the temple of Bel cries aloud: Believe not in the omnipotence of man. The proudest schemes may be baffled. Among the architects of the great states, some unlooked-for confusion of tongues may rise, and then their work will go on no more. The union that is the work of ambition alone is shattered; for it is not the will of princes or of peoples that governs the world, but God.

CHAPTER X.

THE MIGRATION OF THE TERACHITES.

GEN. X., XI. 10—32.

IN the course of time the Israelites obtained some knowledge of a number of different nations, partly by coming into contact with them themselves, and partly by hearing of them from their neighbours. The more thoughtful, therefore, felt an interest in foreign countries, and were anxious to define as closely as possible their relations to each other and to Israel. This desire led some one to draw up a register of the nations of the earth, which we still have in the tenth chapter of Genesis. This table embraces seventy greater or smaller nations, and arranges them in three groups as descendants of Noah's sons, Shem, Japhet, and Ham. The form of this composition is curious, for it is that of a family tree. "Japhet's sons"—so the account begins—"were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, &c.; Gomer's sons, Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah;" and so the enumeration goes on, broken only by the story of Nimrod,¹ the mention of the boundaries of the land of the Canaanites,² and of the Joktanites,³ and the statement that Heber's son was called Peleg (division), because in his time the world was divided,⁴ which means that the human race parted into two groups. At the close of the list we are assured that in this way all the nations are descended from the three sons of Noah. Then follows the story of the building of the tower.

It is quite certain that the names contained in this register are not to be taken as signifying men. Thus the name Canaan appears amongst others; and since this word means Netherlands or Lowlands, it must be the name of a country and not of a man.

¹ Genesis x. 8—12.² v. 19.³ v. 30.⁴ v. 25.

The register, however, does not give us a correct scientific division of the nations; as would be shown, even were there no other proof, by the fact that the compiler mentions a couple of tribes twice over, and even places them in quite different branches of his family tree on these two occasions.¹ But since the list was long thought to be historical, the terms, "Shemitic,"² "Hamitic," and "Japhetic" peoples have come into use.

The rule which the writer followed in assigning their places to the nations and tribes that were known to him, cannot be made out with certainty from his work. All sorts of conjectures have been made on this subject. Some think he made his division according to the colour of the skin of the various peoples; others that it was the position of their countries that decided him, the Hamites being the inhabitants of the hot countries, the Japhetites the nations dwelling to the north, and the Shemites those that lived between the two other sets. But the fact of the Canaanites being placed among the children of Ham is fatal to all these conjectures; for these former inhabitants of the land of the Israelites, whose descendants went on living in the midst of their conquerors, were very nearly related to them, and their being put among the children of Ham rather than those of Shem, shows that love and hate were not without a voice in the composition of this list. The question, however, is too complicated to be entered into any further at present. We need only notice that Shem is called the first born of Noah, because the eldest son was always considered the chief. Among the sons of Shem the first rank is given to Heber,³ the representative of the group of nations to which Israel belonged; but we are not told in this register how Israel was descended from Heber.

¹ Genesis x. 7 and 28, 29.

² Generally written *Semitic*.

³ Genesis x. 21.

This information is given us in a second family tree, which we find in Genesis xi. 10 ff. Its form reminds us at once of the register of Adam's descendants down to Noah,¹ of which it seems to be the continuation. It begins as follows:—"These are the family archives of Shem: Shem was an hundred years old when he begot Arphaxad, two years after the flood. After that he lived five hundred years more, and had sons and daughters." In this style it continues, giving us similar information about Selah, Heber, Peleg, Reu, Serug, Nahor, and Terah. We are told something more of Terah, however, for three of his sons are mentioned by name, Abram, Nahor, and Haran, the father of Lot. Haran died before his father in Ur of the Chaldees, and Abram's wife was called Sarai, but he had no children. His brother Nahor, on the other hand, who had married Haran's daughter Milcah, had children. "Now Terah," so we read, "with Abram, Lot, and Sarai, left his dwelling place, Ur of the Chaldees, to go to Canaan, but, during their stay at Haran, he died."

We need not stay to inquire into the original connection between this and the former register. The one we are now considering seems to have been artificially compiled; for just as there are ten generations from Adam to Noah, so there are ten more from the latter to Abram. In speaking of the names in the former register, we noticed² that, in all probability, they did not, in the first instance, indicate men; and it is quite evident that the names we are now considering did not; for we know the real meaning of some of them. Arphaxad—however strange the assertion may seem to those who have not seen the word in the original—is nothing but another pronunciation of "Ur of the Chaldees;" Selah signifies "sending away;" Heber, "crossing;" Peleg, "separation." The

¹ Genesis v.

² See pp. 70—72, 84 f.

names that follow are unfortunately of unknown, or at least of doubtful, meaning, except that Haran is the name of a district. But from those of which we do understand the meaning, in connection with what the former register teaches us,² we can make out the chief lines of the probable history of the tribes to which Israel, among others, belonged. It comes pretty much to this: "Once the forefathers of Israel and other related tribes lived in Arphaxad, or Ur of the Chaldees. Then they left this country, and crossed the Euphrates, and for this reason they were called Hebrews, that is *men from the other side*. After this they separated into two tribes, and while the Joktanites took a south-easterly course and settled in South Arabia and along the Persian Gulf, the others passed, through the territory of Reu and Serug, south-west. Among these were the ancestors of the Israelites and their nearest neighbours, who may be called the Terachites. Some of them stayed behind and settled in Haran; the rest went on to Canaan." This is all the historical information we can gather from the register; and even this is far from certain.

These accounts of the origin of the Israelites are but scanty, and it is only natural that they should be so, for it is the same with nations as with men;—they enter the world unconsciously, and have no recollection of the beginning of their lives. It is not until they begin to think, to work, to feel that they have a calling to fulfil, in a word, to lead a life above that of the animals, that they can retain the past to any extent in their memory, or that it deserves any interest when preserved. A people must have reached a certain stage of development before it can have a history at all, and many must have floated down the stream of time without its being worth while to record their fortunes. The

² Genesis x. 25.

origin of them all, however, was alike insignificant. What recollection could be preserved of such a life as that led by these rude shepherd tribes? They ate, drank, slept, married, had children, fed their cattle, protected themselves against beasts of prey, went hunting, looked for wells, pitched their tents, broke them up again, fought for a stream or piece of pasture land,—that was the life of these wandering shepherds! In a life such as this nothing of any consequence ever occurred. It is true that even they had their joys, their sorrows, and their religious emotions, that one was superior to another and, doubtless, that some of them were above their surroundings in disposition and cultivation; but the animal nature was still supreme among them, the wants of the body kept all their powers busy, and there were none to raise themselves above the great masses by profound reflection, freshness of thought, and higher views of life. And so generation after generation might pass away, until their posterity could not even fix the time in which their ancestors had inhabited this or that country, or lived under such and such circumstances; and their memory had altogether perished, except perhaps that some few facts in the history of their tribe—a general migration, a separation into two tribes, or the securing of a new abode—might be preserved.

This absence of anything like proper history is closely connected with the constant changes made by these wandering shepherd tribes in the places of their abode. The earliest recollection of most nations is that of a migration. Of course it was necessity for the most part that compelled these tribes to change their place of abode, and to brave the dangers involved in travelling to unknown regions, but yet they really became attached to their nomad (wandering) life, and unless they came to countries whose inhabitants had settled dwellings already, they went on wandering backwards and forwards, and showed but small affection for the soil on which they lived,

until their increasing numbers gradually compelled them to chose settled homes, and bid farewell to their wandering life.

This was a turning point in the life of these tribes. As long as they were wandering about the land, they only thought of the wants of the next few days, or at most of the half-year during which they remained on the same spot,—just sowing a single crop in order to take its produce with them on their further wanderings. Whenever they dug a well or discovered one, they filled it up so as to keep it for their own use when they visited the same pastures again. These were the highest objects of their lives. But when a settled habitation has been secured, men work for different objects. They think of their posterity; they cultivate the land, and develope the art of permanently increasing its fruitfulness. They plant fruit-trees and rear them carefully, for if they never gather their fruits themselves, yet their children will do so. Houses are built of more lasting materials, and the desire to make them suitable to their purpose, and then beautiful and luxurious, gradually calls a number of arts into existence. Dykes are built to protect the country from floods. Increased wants call commerce into life, and enlarge people's views of the world. Navigation begins to be practised, and the difficulties connected with it quicken the intellect of those who engage in it. Gradually all those who do not earn their bread by cultivating the soil, go and live together, so that villages and towns spring up. Living together makes it necessary to regulate all mutual intercourse by certain fixed rules, and so laws are made, and a regular society springs up. The relations of the villages, districts, and countries to each other are regulated in proportion to a growing feeling of the necessity of some such steps; and the undisturbed life in settled abodes makes the exercise of all kinds of arts and sciences possible, until gradually a higher life grows up.

It is not true, then, as some people declare, that the love of our country is the fruit of narrowness of mind. Our country is that portion of the earth upon which our ancestors have worked, and we are bound in our turn to consecrate our powers to the task of making its inhabitants as richly blessed as possible. The saying "My comfort is my country" is the expression of mere selfishness, and is the rule that is followed by the brutes. But for us men there are hallowed recollections bound to the soil on which our cradles were rocked, where we have gathered the fruits of the toils and battles of our fathers, and where we ourselves first woke to the thought that God has work for us to do as well!

No such fatherland belonged to those Hebrews fifteen, sixteen or more centuries before Christ, as they journeyed southward from Armenia, and, whether driven on by enemies or seeking better pasture for their herds, migrated to Canaan. Indeed, they did not want a country of their own, and were well content with their wandering life, so they were half savages still, and their history was not worth remembering. Children of nature as they were, they lived and died with their cattle.

But in the midst of these hordes were the germs of something greater. Many nations were to spring from them: the Arabs, the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites, and finally that people which has rescued most of the tribes connected with it from forgetfulness, the people of Israel.

CHAPTER XI.

A WORD ABOUT THE PATRIARCHS IN GENERAL.

GEN. XII.—L.

THE rest of the book of Genesis is taken up by accounts of Abram, Isaac, and Jacob and his family, or, as they are usually called, "the patriarchs," though this word, as we

have seen, is also used for various personages belonging to a still higher antiquity. Before we begin examining the stories about them, we must stop a moment to consider the question, whether we have now the firm ground of reality beneath our feet, or are still wandering in the realm of legend.

The nature of the scenes we are going to look upon will at once prove to us that many of their features are invented ; for it needs no proof that stories in which a deity goes about with men, holds conversations with them, and even eats in their tents, do not give us accurate accounts of real events. But although we cannot accept the accounts of the patriarchs as completely trustworthy, we might easily suppose that they had a historical foundation, that such men as Abram, Isaac, Jacob, and the rest did really live, and that the stories give us, on the whole, a correct account of their fortunes, though in an embellished and exaggerated form. But when we come to examine these stories closely, and to compare them with each other, we find that this is not the case, and that the names of the patriarchs must be explained in the same way as those of Arphaxad, Heber, Peleg, and others, of which we spoke in the preceding chapter. That is to say, they do not signify men, so much as groups of nations or single tribes. Abram, for instance, represents a great part of the Terachites ; Lot, the Moabites and Ammonites, whose ancestor he is called ; Ishmael, certain tribes of Arabia ; Isaac, Israel and Edom together ; Jacob, Israel alone ; while his twelve sons stand for the twelve tribes of Israel.

Some of my readers, no doubt, consider this a most extraordinary assertion ; and they will not be sorry, therefore, to hear some of the grounds upon which it rests. We must be very brief, however, for fear of falling into repetitions ; as in dealing with the separate stories we shall be obliged from time to time to keep this meaning of the names of the patri-

archs well in view, in order fully to understand what is told us about them. We must therefore be content at present with a few arguments which will show at any rate that this view of the names, Abram, Isaac, Jacob, &c., is not a mere groundless fancy.

We must begin by forming a clear idea of the main object of these stories about the patriarchs. They are intended, in the first instance, to give us information as to the descent of Israel and certain related peoples, and to tell us which nations are descended from Abraham. These are, first, the descendants of Ishmael, Hagar's son, the inhabitants of Arabia Deserta; and, secondly, to follow the order of age through Abraham's family, the Edomites and Israelites, who are descended from Isaac; lastly, we read that Abraham took a wife of the second rank, or concubine, called Keturah, who presented him with six sons, from whom most of the tribes of Arabia Felix and Arabia Petræa sprang.¹ We will not at present dwell on the fact that the story of Abraham's marriage with Keturah, contracted long after he was a hundred years old, is quite incredible, but will only ask how we are to believe that all these nations, including the numerous Arab tribes, are descendants of Abraham. Even if we confine our attention to the Israelites, it is impossible to accept this representation; for, according to the old narrators, all the Israelites are children of Jacob, whose descendants numbered seventy-two when he went to Egypt.² It is true that, according to Genesis, the patriarchs, as princes of their tribes, had slaves as well as children. Thus Abraham had three hundred and eighteen slaves, capable of bearing arms, that had been born in his household, and Jacob returned from Haran with a numerous band to Canaan; but these serfs were not among the "sons of Israel," and the question is still unsolved how the descendants of seventy-

¹ Genesis xxv. 1-4.

² Deuteronomy x. 22.

two individuals could become a mighty nation within a few centuries. Since the name of Keturah means "frankincense," and all the Arab tribes that are called the descendants of her sons lived in the land of frankincense, the meaning of the story of Abraham's marriage with her is obvious. It means that the Arabs and the Israelites were related to each other; and in making Keturah only a secondary wife of Abraham, the story represents her children as of less honourable descent than the offspring of Abraham by his principal wife Sarah.

Here and there the writers of the old legends themselves point out, as it were, that the patriarchs whom they bring upon the scene as men are personifications of tribes. This is the case for instance in one of the stories about Esau, in which it is said in so many words, "Esau, that is Edom," and "Esau is the father of the Edomites."¹

This is still clearer in the account of the close of Jacob's life. A poem is put into his mouth on this occasion, in which he pronounces a blessing or a curse upon each of his sons. But the twelve tribes are evidently in the writer's mind, and he altogether forgets that the form under which he is singing of the character and the condition of these tribes, is that of the patriarch's farewell to his sons. Thus he makes Jacob use his own name as that of a people, when he puts this prediction into his mouth: "I will spread them (the Simeonites and the Levites) abroad in Jacob and scatter them in Israel,"² and "Dan shall judge his people like one of the tribes of Israel,"³ and the whole poem is closed by the explanatory words, "All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said concerning them."⁴

How striking is the story of Jacob's love of Benjamin, his youngest son, and after Joseph's disappearance the only

¹ Genesis xxxvi. 1, 8, 9, 19, 43.

² Genesis xlix. 1—27.

³ v. 7.

⁴ v. 16.

⁵ v. 28.

child of his beloved Rachel that was left to him! How touching his unwillingness to let his darling go to Egypt with his brethren! And how it surprises us therefore to discover that this Benjamin was already the father of ten sons.¹ This shows us that the writer is telling us the fortunes of tribes under the form of a family history.

The idea of representing a nation or a tribe as a man in whose history the fortunes of the tribe were reflected, so to speak, however strange to us, was very common in ancient times. Thus the Greeks or Hellenes traced their origin to a certain Hellen, who was called the son of Deucalion and Pyrrha,² and whose sons Dorus and Eolus, and grandsons Achæus and Ion were said to be the fathers of the four Greek tribes, the Dorians, Eolians, Achæans, and Ionians. In something the same way Englishmen are sometimes called "Sons of Albion," and a still nearer parallel is furnished by the Dutch poets, who sometimes speak of their countrymen as the offspring of Bato, and by the Frisians, who call themselves Frizo's sons, without, of course, intending to assert that such men as Bato or Frizo ever really lived. Just in the same way, then, Abraham and his sons are not literally the ancestors of all the peoples that are called their descendants in Genesis, but are only their representatives.

If this is so, the question rises; Have we really the primeval history of the Israelite and other related tribes before us in these stories? Do they really transport us to the pre-Mosaic period? The more we try to go into the question of the origin of the legends, the more doubtful do we find the ground upon which we stand; and, therefore, while we have not the least hesitation in explaining the names of the patriarchs on the principles already stated, yet we cannot give an equally confident answer to this question as to the historical value of the traditions about them. It is

¹ Genesis xlv. 21.

² See p. 89.

possible that in some of the stories, historical traditions from the pre-Mosaic period have been preserved. The account, for instance, of Joseph's being sold as a slave by his brothers, and of his elevation to the rank of a prince in Egypt having given them the opportunity of migrating thither, may possibly embody a recollection of the fact that the tribe Joseph paved the way to Egypt for the other tribes. But this is not certain, nay it is not even likely. It is undeniable that some of the stories at least give us information, under the form of the history of these patriarchs, about the fortunes and exploits of the tribes long after the time of Moses. We shall meet with some examples of this presently.

Lastly, it may be asked: If the contents of these narratives, even when understood as tribal history, bring us down to a later period, what is the real origin of the names Abram, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, &c.? As to this, we are almost entirely in the dark. Some scholars suppose that at any rate some of these names were originally those of gods, and point out that "Abram" may mean "exalted father." But satisfactory grounds have never been made out for this view. No doubt the names of the sons of Jacob were simply those of the Israelite tribes, which might easily be used as the names of tribal fathers, since the tribes were in the habit of calling themselves "the sons of Judah, Reuben, Napthali, &c." We have already had examples in the names of Canaan and Heber,¹ of the way in which the names of countries and peoples might be treated as those of men.

It is not easy for us to form a true idea of the way in which these legends of primeval times came into existence; but some of the motives of the compilers can still be detected, understood, and estimated by us. Let us try to sketch, in broad lines, a history of the rise of these legends.

¹ Pp. 123, 124, 125.

In the time of Moses, and even long after his death, when the Israelite tribes stood to a great extent alone, and were not yet united into one people, their religious customs were very varied and capricious. No doubt all the Israelites worshipped Yahweh as Israel's god, but every tribe and every clan, nay, many separate families or individuals, had their own special god or gods besides. In some parts of the land of Canaan ancient forms of worship were already established, and the invading tribes took part in them, either retaining the ancient gods of the place, or superseding them by others. These "Holy Places" were the centres of the national life in the districts to which they belonged. Such, for example, was the sanctuary of Beersheba. There, on the southern boundary of Canaan, where the Israelites were in constant communication with the Edomites, was a much-frequented sanctuary to which the "sons of Isaac" brought their offerings. The centre of Judah's religious life, on the other hand, was Hebron, and there the ancestor of the people was known by the name of Abram. So, again, there were sanctuaries in Shechem and in Bethel which were sought by pilgrims from the surrounding district of the tribes of Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh, who called themselves the "sons of Jacob." In the northern portion of the country Baal-Gad, *i.e.*, "the Baal of Good Fortune," or "of the Gadites," was worshipped, and in the north-west of Judah, at Bethshemesh, *i.e.*, "house of the Sun," some form of the worship of the Sun-god was established. Among the objects worshipped and held to be sacred were stones and trees, especially oak and terebinth trees.

In David's time, however, the unity of the people was established, and though it was broken again after Solomon's death, the recognition of the close relationship of all the tribes was never afterwards lost. The Israelites of the north and those of the south felt that they were brothers, and at

certain periods were very closely united. The two portions of the nation were called collectively, "the people of Yahweh," and in both the influence of the Mosaic party continually increased. This party was, of course, very hostile to the ancient local forms of worship, inasmuch as they were injurious to that of Yahweh. They would gladly have removed these sacred trees and stones, therefore, and wiped out the names of the idols. But it was not easy to do so, as the people were much attached to their local customs. The zealous upholders of the exclusive worship of Yahweh saw no chance, therefore, of getting rid of the religious usages of centuries all at once. The course they adopted, accordingly, was to try to attach a different meaning to them, to give them an orthodox colouring, if I may so express myself. The names of the various tribes and districts were made into those of men, and were then brought into connection with each other. Abram, the patriarch of Hebron, Isaac that of Beersheba, and Jacob of Bethel, became grandfather, father, and son. The anointed stone at Bethel, the consecrated oaks of Mamre (near Hebron), the sacred tree at Shechem, and the well of Beersheba, were all of them gradually made into monuments of the lives of these patriarchs. These were the spots on which they had pitched their tents, these the trees that they had planted, these the wells they had dug, and these the memorial stones or the altars they had erected. In this manner the ancient names and venerated objects were made not only harmless but actually favourable to the purer form of worship, for the patriarchs were represented as favourites of Yahweh, and as his faithful worshippers, and the holy places as the scenes of the revelations of this god of Israel.

In this sketch, I have purposely expressed myself ambiguously here and there, and have left it quite an open

question what the names of the patriarchs originally meant ; for this, as well as many other points, is very doubtful. But the main idea of this account of the origin of the legends of the patriarchs rests on a firm basis ; the upholders of the exclusive worship of Yahweh gave them the form which they assume in these stories, so as to find a place in the worship of Yahweh for certain elements of the old-Israelite or heathen religions, such as sacred names, places, usages and objects.

In acting thus the zealous worshippers of Yahweh do not stand alone, for we can trace a similar effort amongst very various peoples, and at very different periods. Thus, in certain Asiatic states, the god Baal was made into a king, to whom the founding of a number of cities was attributed, and whose grave was pointed out in different places. The case was the same with other gods and goddesses in Egypt, Asia-Minor, Babylonia, and Greece.¹ The cause was partly a misunderstanding, but partly the desire to supersede ancient forms of worship. This method is often called Euhemerism, after a certain Greek philosopher, named Euhēmērus, who lived in the times of Alexander the Great, and systematically made all the Greek gods into kings and generals. But we need not go so far or climb to such a height of antiquity, to find examples of this procedure. In our own country it was practised by the preachers of Christianity, for when they brought the Gospel to our land they found its inhabitants just as much attached to their gods and feasts, their sacred usages and consecrated trees, as were those ancient Israelites whose conversion to the exclusive worship of Yahweh was the object of the writers of the legends about the patriarchs. They were ready to accept Christianity, but if only it could be managed they were very anxious to retain the names and usages to which they were accustomed. So the preachers of Christianity

¹ See pp. 112, 113, 114.

allowed them to keep a great many of them, but gave them a Christian interpretation. Sacred stones were marked with the cross and became memorial stones, sacred wells were made into baptismal fonts, images of gods transformed into images of saints. The consequence is that remains of the old heathen forms of worship have survived to this very day in Easter eggs, yule logs, and, on the Continent, Whitsun fires, the customs of Santa Claus, and many others. The very name, for instance, of Easter (in German Ostern) reminds us immediately of the worship of the heathen goddess Ostara, whose feast was celebrated in spring.

It is quite common, then, for religious reformers—seeing that they cannot have everything as they would wish, and that they cannot attain their object unless they make some concessions—to try to gain people over by taking a middle course, and so toning down their requirements as to allow their converts to retain some portion of their ancient beliefs or beloved usages.

But however often this path has been and is yet trodden, we have still to ask: Is it right? Does it bring us to the goal? If the goal is the triumph of some form of worship, some doctrine, or some ecclesiastical system, then doubtless it is much easier to reach the desired end by this means than by concealing nothing that we think, calling everything by its right name, forbidding what we feel is not right, and yielding nothing. But by “mixing wine with water” we degrade the view of truth for which we desire to find access, and allow many elements of the old view to creep into the new. In consequence of these proceedings on the part of their champions, both the Yahweh-worship of Israel and the Christian church have taken up into themselves much that has been disfiguring and injurious to them.

Those who are determined to see a great and immediate result of their preaching, and are content if they can count

up a large number of converts, without examining very closely how much alloy has mingled with the purity of their faith, must adopt this method. But those who are truly zealous for God and for the truth go right forward, are content with nothing short of the full demands of God, and prefer weighing their converts to counting them. What the result to themselves often is we are taught by the cross upon which Jesus died, because he would make no treaty with the world, and because his followers were therefore few in number. But just for that reason he became more than the founder of a church, he became the Saviour of the world.

One more general remark must be made about the stories of the patriarchs. Here, again, as was the case with the first eleven chapters of Genesis, we have the work of more than one writer before us. We have no difficulty in recognising here and there the style and the thoughts of the writers who told us of Adam and Noah, of Cain and Enoch, though we cannot always make out with certainty how the accounts of the two have been woven together, and then united with those of yet others.

Sometimes the writers do not agree together. An instance occurs quite at the beginning; for while the book of Origins makes Terah and his clan leave Ur of the Chaldees and go to Haran, where Terah himself dies, without assigning any religious motive to him, the older writer, without mentioning Terah at all, begins: "And Yahweh said to Abram."¹ Whence he supposes the patriarch to depart is anything but clear. Since the departure from Ur of the Chaldees immediately precedes this narrative, it is natural to suppose that that is the place referred to here as well, as is stated indeed elsewhere;² but in another passage³ Haran, that is Mesopo-

¹ Genesis xii. 1.² Genesis xv. 7.³ Genesis xxiv. 4, 7, 10.

tamia, is indicated as Abram's country. When we come to the stories themselves, we shall find other instances of mutual disagreement between the narratives.

The two writers, as might have been expected, show the same peculiarities in the stories of Abram and his sons that we have already noticed. The accounts of the later writer are rather colourless, but the older stories are full of life and variety, for in them the most ancient times are painted with all the traits and colours of a comparatively recent period ; with the worship of Yahweh for instance, and most of the religious usages of the Israelites.

This is, to a great extent, what gives these narratives their charm. The deeper we penetrate into their meaning, the clearer is the insight they give us into the life of the people in whose midst they arose. But if this had been their only value they would certainly never have become so universally known and loved as they are, for this meaning is sometimes far enough below the surface, and escapes the ordinary reader. But they are precious even as sketches of character ; for in the patriarchs, especially in Abraham and Jacob, we have before us the images of pious men after the heart of the writers, and since they are drawn by the hand of a warm affection, they often speak to our conscience as well as our imagination.

We shall therefore treat these stories chiefly as sketches of character. We shall indeed point out, whenever we are able, the interest that animated the compilers, and the objects they had in view in telling their stories ; but for the rest, we shall speak of Abram, Hagar, Esau, Joseph, and all the others, as if they were men who really lived, and shall try to strengthen our moral life by marking their faith, and to take warning from the description of their sins.

CHAPTER XII.

ABRAM THE BELIEVER.

GEN. XII.

SURROUNDED by his relatives and friends, in the plain of Haran, in the northern part of Mesopotamia, dwelt Abram; and hard by his tents his friend and nephew Lot would often feed his flocks.

The two shepherd princes were rich in cattle, and a host of dependents obeyed them, while they were bound to each other by the closest ties of friendship. A striking proof of this friendship was given by Lot, when he lent an ear to his uncle, who urged him to accompany him on a distant journey he was about to undertake. He was going away south-west, across the Euphrates, and then . . . as yet he did not know where next himself.

Why was he going to change his abode? Was he driven to it by necessity? Was there no more pasture for his cattle? Had enmity risen between him and his relatives? Or did love of change and hope of booty urge him on? Had he forgotten that all kinds of unknown dangers threatened him on his way through the lands of strangers? Not at all. However poorly his country had been blessed by the beauties of nature; nay, however parched and dry it was during many seasons of the year, still it was dear to him, and he was on the best possible terms with his relatives, the men of Nahor, and even in religion was at one with them.¹ He must go because Yahweh, his god, told him to go. Why he did so, and where he would take him, he did not know; his duty was but to obey.

So they started on their journey, these men of faith, sure that Yahweh would bring them to a good land. He had

¹ Genesis xxiv. 31.

distinctly promised Abram that he would bless him and make him a great people. His friends should be blessed and his enemies cursed, and the fame of his prosperity should spread so far amongst all nations, that when anyone wanted to pronounce the greatest possible blessing, he would only be able to say, "God make you blessed as Abram!"¹ They relied on the power of this god, who had given them such glorious promises.

They passed over the Euphrates and through the Syrian desert; through those wide steppes where only here and there a fruitful spot, such as those upon which Palmyra and Damascus were afterwards to rise, invited them to stay, still south-west, till they crossed the Jordan and came to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, which they found thinly populated by certain Canaanite tribes. They passed through this land too, trusting in their good swords and the might of Yahweh. They felt that they had a right to be there, and no one asked toll of them.

The first spot at which they stayed for any length of time had a strange appearance. Two mountains, of moderate height, rear themselves over against each other there. Ebal, the more northern peak, is parched and barren, but Gerizim, the more southern, rather loftier than the other, has a somewhat more pleasing aspect. In the valley between these mountains, where Shechem was afterwards built, an oak of more than ordinary beauty raised its head; it was the oak of Moreh, that is, "the teacher's oak." There the wanderers pitched their tents, and Abram soon discovered that it was a holy spot, where Yahweh revealed himself and loved to receive the offerings of his servants; for here his god appeared to him and told him that he had now reached the goal of his journey, for this was the land that his posterity should receive as an inheritance. So Abram built an

¹ Genesis xii. 3, after an amended version.

altar to Yahweh there, and the spot became a sacred place in Israel. The oak of Moreh, under the name of "the soothsayer's oak (Meonenim),"¹ was destined to become famous in all the country round, and to be regarded as the sanctuary of Shechem; and there the worshippers bowed down before the deity who had chosen this tree for his dwelling place, as they approached him with supplications and with offerings, or listened to the whispering of the sacred leaves, and, full of awe, received from the lips of the soothsayers the interpretation of the sounds they had heard.

From Shechem the patriarch pursued his journey to the height of Bethel. Between this city and Ai he pitched his tents, and found again that Yahweh was with him there, and so built an altar in honour of him. This place, accordingly, the name of which means "god's house," was no less sacred to the Israelites than Shechem.

Still pursuing their way in the same direction, the Hebrews reached the most southern regions of Canaan.

So Abram had passed through the whole of his promised land, from north to south, when he discovered that it had indeed been promised to his posterity, but not to himself; for a famine compelled him to leave the barren region of southern Canaan for the fertile Egypt, and to sojourn in a strange land, instead of in the country, which his hopes had already taught him to regard as his home.

But even there he was to receive a wonderful proof of the faithfulness and power of his God; for when he drew near to Egypt his faith grew weak, and he was afraid. He came there as a stranger; and his wife Sarai, who was very beautiful, was with him. Suppose—thought he—the inhabitants of the land cast their eyes upon her, they are sure to kill me, and then make her marry one of them. So he told his wife to say she was his sister, so that if they seized her they

¹ Judges ix. 37.

might give him rich presents as her brother, instead of killing him as her husband. It all fell out just as he had expected. The king himself, hearing of Sarai's beauty, had her brought to him to become one of his wives, and presented Abram, supposing him to be her brother, with a great number of sheep, cattle, asses, and male and female slaves, so that he became very rich. But this was not the greatest blessing that Yahweh intended to confer upon him. He was about to make his servant utterly ashamed of his previous fear, and to show that he could defend him even in a foreign country. At his command, one disaster after another fell upon the king and his household, and he soon perceived that all this happened to him because he had taken a married woman into his harem. So he sent for Abram, and reproached him with the deceit by which he had brought him into danger of committing so great a sin. Then he ordered his people to protect and to help Abram, and all that he had.

This adventure of Sarai's is told not so much to Abram's disgrace as to Yahweh's honour. The writer does not appear to have seen anything wrong in Abram's conduct. This shows that he had no very exalted idea of integrity, as we shall see indeed from other passages as well as this. It is very instructive to compare our story with the account of the same event given by another writer,¹ for it shows us how low a position the Israelites took in matters such as these. This other writer removes the scene of the adventure to Gerar, in the land of the Philistines, and says that Abimelech, the king, who had taken Sarai away from Abram, was warned by God in a dream that she was a married woman, and reproached the patriarch for his deceit. But he defended himself by saying that Sarai really was his half-sister, and

¹ Genesis xx.

that ever since they had left their fatherland and begun their wanderings, he had begged her to call herself his sister for fear he should be injured for her sake. Abimelech was perfectly satisfied by this excuse, loaded the patriarch with gifts, and made a present to Sarai also, with the words, "May this make you close your eyes to all the wrong that has been done you. May justice thus be done you."¹ It looks very much as if this writer wished to acquit the patriarch of the lie by which he was disgraced in the older narrative; but if so he did not see that he failed to make the affair any more creditable to his hero after all. For such shuffling is just as bad as a lie; nay, a premeditated, persevering, systematic deceit really tells more against a man's character than a lie which is the result of a momentary fright.

And, again, neither writer seems to have felt how unutterably base it was in Abram to tell this lie, not for the sake of rescuing his wife, but for the sake of turning it to account in his own private interest if she were taken away from him.

But enough of this. The whole story represents Abram as the believer, who, "in obedience to Yahweh's commandment, goes out indeed to a land which he shall receive for an inheritance, but without knowing whither he goes."² In this character we shall meet him again and again, and in this lies the deep and lasting significance of Abram, as he is represented in Genesis. He is the hero of faith.

There are people in the world who shrug their shoulders when they hear anyone speak of faith, and take a special pride in not having any themselves. Very often they are better than their word, and have more faith in their hearts than they are at all aware of; while their contempt for faith is the result of their not understanding what it means. If it were not so we could have but small respect for any man

¹ After an amended version.

² Hebrews xi. 8.

who thinks that faith is worthless, for it is just in having faith that the noblest of mankind differ from the common herd.

Properly to understand what faith is and what it is worth, we must first understand what is meant by God speaking to a man. In this story, and in many others, God is represented as holding conversations with men, and telling them various things in actual words. It needs no proof that this is not what really takes place, for no man can hear God's voice with his outward ears. He speaks in our conscience. Whenever our duty becomes clear to us, then we hear the voice of God giving us commands; and whenever we feel that our true happiness lies in obedience to this voice, we receive promises from God. Now, if we are firmly convinced that these commands and these promises are not merely imaginary but are true, then we may be said to have faith.

Faith shows itself in various ways. It is often mingled with products of the imagination, that is with superstition. If, for instance, Abram felt, as the later Israelite writers say he did,¹ that he must flee from the land of his fathers, because he was in danger of falling into idolatry there; if he saw that Yahweh would bless him elsewhere too, and that it is better for a man to be a wanderer on the earth and to worship his god in uprightness than to remain in his fatherland and live a life of sin, then that was faith. But if he thought that the land of Canaan was the precise reward assigned to his obedience, then that was all imagination, and therefore superstition. For though in the legend this promise is both made and kept, yet in reality earthly possessions are not the reward of piety. We shall often see from our Bible-stories that, as a rule, the faith of the Israelites was clothed in imperfect forms, that it was mingled

¹ Joshua xxiv. 2, 14, 15. Flavius Josephus. Judith v. 6 ff.

with superstition. Even with Christians this is very often the case. But in whatever form it shows itself, however far it is from perfect purity, faith is a treasure always. A man with faith is in every case something more than a man without it, for faith is a power that rescues him from the tyranny of his sensual nature and gives him the strength to make sacrifices.

All reformers and all the noblest benefactors of mankind have had faith, and one of the followers of Jesus said in honour of him that he was "perfect in faith."¹

CHAPTER XIII.

ABRAM'S GENEROSITY.

GEN. XIII., XIV.

WHEN Abram—so the narrator goes on—had escaped this danger in Egypt, he returned with his wife and all his possessions to the south of Judah. Lot still accompanied him, and they returned along the road they had come by, always halting in the same places as before, till they pitched their tents once more between Bethel and Ai. There Abram offered a second sacrifice to Yahweh on the altar he had already erected to him.

But gradually it became clear that the two shepherd princes could not live together much longer; for they were both of them rich in flocks. Not that this would have made it impossible for them to remain in the same neighbourhood if only they had had free play; but the Canaanites and Perizzites had possession of a great deal of the land, and the Hebrews had to be content with the portions that these tribes did not require for themselves. So the land

¹ Hebrews xii. 2.

became too small for them, and though Abram and Lot still continued to be good friends, their dependants were always quarrelling about pastures and wells. Now, as each of them kept hearing his own shepherds complain of the other's, and was naturally inclined to side with his own servants, there really seemed to be some danger of their falling out with each other in the end.

Abram was the first to see this, and however much he would have liked to go on living with his dearly-loved kinsman, he thought it better for them to part in peace before it was too late, than to remain together and endanger the bond of brotherly love which united them. So he proposed to Lot that they should separate, and, with open-hearted generosity, left him the choice as to which way he would go. He had no wish to dictate to his nephew; if he went to the right, he would go to the left himself, or if Lot took the left, he would take the right.

Lot was far inferior to Abram in generosity. He had followed him from the distant land, and so had had faith in the glorious promises made by Yahweh to Abram. But now self-interest overpowered him. Instead of asking what was the wish of his uncle, the chief of his tribe, he took advantage of his open liberality, and chose as his portion the valley of the Jordan. From a worldly point of view he had made a very wise selection, for the valley of the Jordan was a splendid country, and the southern portion especially, where the Dead Sea now is, but where Sodom and Gomorrah formerly lay, was a true "garden of Yahweh," a paradise, like Egypt in fruitfulness. But there was a dark side to the settlement in this region, for Lot's heart was drawn towards the cities. And though he did not desert the simple shepherd life at once, yet he pitched his tents hard by Sodom, and before long settled in the city itself. This was a source of misery to him against which no fruitfulness of the soil could

weigh, for the inhabitants of these cities were great sinners before Yahweh, and his wrath would sooner or later blaze forth against them.

So Lot's coveteousness led him on to misfortune, and, moreover, by choosing to go to the extreme limit, and as it were to quit the land, he forfeited all the claim of his posterity to Canaan.

On the other hand, Abram, who obeyed the will of Yahweh, received a renewal of the promises when his nephew had departed. It was as though his god would make it plain to him that the departure of Lot in no way affected his promises, and that he himself, and not his nephew, was to be the father of the holy nation that would possess Canaan. "Look round you!"—such were the words of Yahweh—"Look towards every quarter of heaven, towards Lebanon and towards the boundary of Egypt, towards the Jordan and towards the Mediterranean Sea; all this land shall be an eternal heritage for your posterity, which I will make as countless as the dust of the earth. Pass through the country in every direction, and know that you are the father of its future possessors."

Abram obeyed, and journeyed southward. Thus he came to Hebron, or more properly to the district in which a city was afterwards built, called Kirjath Arbah until it was conquered by the Israelites, and after that Hebron. Here there were splendid groves of oak trees belonging to the Canaanite Mamre. For whole centuries the Canaanites, and after them the Israelites, would worship their gods at this spot, and gaze with especial awe and reverence at one gigantic oak. Down to the first century of our era the people in the neighbourhood of Hebron would tell how this tree was as old as the world, or would boast that it had grown from a stick thrust into the ground by Abram. By this grove the Patriarch pitched his tent after receiving Yahweh's

promise. There he was to learn how well it was for him that he had not gone to the valley of Jordan, that seemed so tempting, and how constantly his god protected and helped him.

For it happened that several princes from the north-east, of whom Kedor-laomer, an Elamite king, was the chief, declared war against the kings of Sodom and four other cities that lay in the so-called valley of Siddim. For twelve years the inhabitants of the valley of Siddim had been tributary to Kedor-laomer, but then they threw off his yoke. Hardly had a year gone by, however, before this prince appeared with an army to reduce them once more to submission. The march of the eastern kings was triumphant. They came down from the north, defeated the Rephaites at Ashteroth-Karnaim, conquered several other tribes east of the Dead Sea, marched round Mount Seir, and penetrated into the desert of Arabia Petræa as far as Hazezon Tamar, to the west of the valley of Siddim. Then the King of Sodom and his allies advanced to meet him—five against four! But, in spite of this, they were defeated and dispersed, while numbers of fugitives fell into the wells of asphalt, of which the valley was full, and the rest escaped to the hills. Thereupon the eastern kings took off the cattle and the provisions that they found in their enemies' cities; and, amongst other captives, Lot, who lived in Sodom, was carried off, with all that he had.

News of all this was brought to Abram, who had pitched his tents in the neighbourhood of Mamre, Eshcol, and Aner, with whom he had entered into an alliance. No sooner had he received the dismal tidings than he determined to hasten to the rescue. Thinking nothing of the danger to himself, and forgetting how badly Lot had behaved to him, he called together all those of his dependents who had been born his serfs, thinking that he could rely upon their fidelity more

confidently than upon that of the slaves he had bought. They were three hundred and eighteen strong, and Abram's allies added some bands of their own dependents to help them. With this force Abram set out in pursuit of the foreign princes. Overtaking them at Dan, one of the most northern points of Canaan, he divided his men into three companies, fell upon them by night, and scattered abroad the whole army of the four chieftains against whom the five kings of the valley of Siddim had not been able to hold their ground. Right on to Hobah, north of Damascus, he pursued the fugitives ; and all the booty they had made, including the captives of war whom they were carrying off as slaves, fell into his hands. Thus Lot was rescued with the rest.

As the victorious Abram was returning, the humbled King of Sodom met him in the valley of Shaveh (afterwards called "King's Valley"¹), and implored him to be content with the cattle and the other booty he had seized from the enemy, but to give their liberty to the captives that had fallen into his hands and were therefore his slaves according to the rights of war. At the same time Abram was visited by Melchizedek, the King of Salem ; who brought him bread and wine, and, being a priest of the most high God, blessed him with the words : "Blessed be Abram of the Most High, of the All-ruler ! And glory be to this Most High, for he has put your enemies into your power !" And Abram gave him the tenth part of all he had. This did not prevent his being bountiful and generous to the King of Sodom, to whose prayer he answered : "I swear by Yahweh the All-ruler that I will keep nothing that was yours, no not so much as a thread or a shoe-string !—for you shall never be able to say : "I have made Abram rich !" Of course I am not bound to make good what my men have eaten, nor can I

¹ 2 Samuel xviii. 18.

dispose of that part of the booty that falls to the share of my allies, as a reward of the help they have given us ; but as for me, I will never enrich myself at your expense."

There is nothing in the chapters containing this narrative, that has excited the attention of the commentators so much as this meeting between Melchizedek and Abram, and many a brain has been sorely perplexed by the questions, "Where did the city of Salem lie?" "How came there to be a priest of God most high, to whom Abram did homage, in the midst of a population that is always branded as idolatrous?" Indeed, there is something enigmatical about this figure, and it is hard to explain how Abram, who had not his possessions with him, could give him a tithe of them all. We leave it, however, to those who look upon the narrative as history, to remove these difficulties. If we take it to be a legend, and only ask what the compiler meant by it, then the explanation is simple enough. Melchizedek—the word means "king of righteousness"—is a symbolical name; Salem is Jerusalem. Not that this city ever really bore the name of Salem, for until it was conquered by David it was called Jebus ; but the writer called the city by the last half of its ordinary name, that is *Salem* or "peace," because he wanted to speak of Jerusalem, but yet not to use its old Canaanite name. The main point in the story is that Melchizedek is a priest, and as such blesses Abram and receives the tithes, and its object is to exalt the priesthood of Jerusalem, which claimed homage and tithes from everyone.

The account of Melchizedek does not appear to come from the writer of the rest of the story, who never hesitates to use names taken from his own times when speaking of earlier ages. Thus he speaks of Bethel, Ai, Hebron, and Dan as if places so called had existed before the conquest of

Canaan by the Israelites, and he would, therefore, have been at no pains to choose such expressions as "Salem" and "the most high God," but would have spoken of "Jerusalem" and "Yahweh" without more ado. Besides, the meeting with Melchizedek is very strangely placed in the story in the middle of the account of the meeting with the King of Sodom. In the Israelite literature we only find one single reference to this story,¹ but, as if to make amends, the Christians are never tired of dwelling upon it. First of all comes the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who sees in Melchizedek an indication of the high-priestly rank of Jesus, and explains the statement that Abram, the father of the priestly tribe of Levi, paid him tithes after having received his blessing, as a prophetic allusion to the doing away of the Jewish laws about the priesthood of the Levites.¹ Later teachers of the church followed the example of this writer, and discovered in Melchizedek all kinds of meanings, which were furnished them by the so-called "allegorical interpretation of scripture."

The great number of the proper names that occur in the account of the campaign of the eastern kings against the princes of the valley of Siddim has led many historical students to hope that they might find in this narrative an ancient and trustworthy monument of history. But when we look more closely into it we are disappointed in this hope, for it is quite evident that some of the names have a symbolic meaning. Thus one of Kedor-laomer's allies is called "king of the heathens" (authorised version "king of nations"), which is surely a strange title. The name of Bera, the king of Sodom, means "son of ungodliness," and Birsha, the name of the king of Gomorrah, "son of the wicked." We can hardly suppose that these are historical

¹ Hebrews vii. 20 ff.

names ! Besides this, the main incident in the story, the defeat of the eastern kings by such a little band as Abram's, is improbability itself.

It seems to be true, however, that in very early times there really was a powerful kingdom, the seat of which was in Elam, that held sway as far as to the borders of Palestine. The names of the monarchs of this kingdom often began with Kudur (Kedor), and as one of their gods was called Lagamar, it is quite possible that Kudur-lagamar (Kedor-laomer) is the real name of some ancient king of Elam, though it has not yet been found upon any inscription.

For the rest, the legend needs no elaborate explanation. The main thought is that Abram, the believer, is under Yahweh's protection ; for when Lot has gone his way Yahweh confines his promises to Abram alone, lends him his help so that he can conquer these mighty kings with his little band, and makes him so rich that he has no need to keep any of the booty he has won by war.

Abram, on his side, appears in this narrative as the disinterested and generous hero who gives Lot the first choice of country, risks his life to rescue him, refuses to keep the spoil of war, and freely gives his tithes to the priest. A noble figure ! What a different spirit these actions breathe from that which is commonly met with in the world ! Just think how often men quarrel for the best portion of anything, stand upon their rights, seize everything pleasant for themselves, consider whether they are called upon to give up the smallest thing to which they have a legal claim, hesitate to help a man "because he never did as much for them," will run no risk for another's sake for fear they should suffer themselves, like to be paid for any services they may have done, and calculate for how little they can get off when they are asked for a contribution to religious or

any other useful institutions ! Self-interest is a most powerful incentive, and such a character as Abram's is but rare !

This is only natural, for man enters life as a selfish being. Look at children quarrelling over some trifle, and see how each begins by looking after himself ! A power must come into their hearts that can blunt the eagerness of their self-seeking, a power that can resist their inborn selfishness of disposition.

Now faith is such a power. Why should not Abram be generous when he trusted so perfectly in his god ? Why should he not be ready to give Lot his choice as to the country he would take in possession ? Yahweh took care of him. Why should he hesitate to go out to battle ? Did not the angel of Yahweh encamp round about them that feared him ?¹ Why should one who had Yahweh's promises keep the spoil of war for himself ? It was not for the sake of booty that he had done as he did.

So powerful has faith been in every age ; so powerful is it still. This is why a man who has faith is generous and liberal, and rises by his faith above the common run of men, who seek nothing but their own advantage. Those who have faith, no less than others, like to grow rich, and their carnal nature urges them, too, to take the best for themselves and to run no risks for anyone else ; but they find a yet greater treasure in contentment, cheerfulness, quickness of sympathy, love ; in a single word—a rich inner life ; and they trust that this spiritual happiness will ever increase within them. Those who are so rich cannot be mean. Those who feel that they are happy, and cherish in their hearts a living hope, cannot bring themselves to be for ever calculating what will be most to their own advantage ; and, without any effort, they bring into practice that command

¹ Psalm xxxiv. 7.

of Jesus which sounds so strange and exaggerated: "Give to him that asks of you, and turn not away from him who would borrow of you."¹

CHAPTER XIV.

THE OATH OF YAHWEH.

GEN. XV.

THE battle was over, and Lot had gone on his way. Abram could return to his tents and once more engage in his peaceful occupations, keeping his sword and his arrows sharp for the bear and the lion only. But now a heaviness of heart he had never felt before overpowered him. In the might of faith he had lived and worked, he had overthrown his enemies though far outnumbered by them, and had generously given away the treasure, and as long as he had been active he had felt no weariness. But now his lower nature re-asserted its claims and made itself felt by his very soul. Abram was sad at heart. He thought of the fatherland he had left. He thought of the dangers that surrounded him. He strained his eyes in vain to see into the darkness of the future. Yahweh had promised him the land that he had passed through; but how was this promise to be fulfilled? and who was to enjoy its fulfilment? He had no children, and both he and his wife were now so old that they had given up all hope of ever having any. His relations all lived far away. Lot had left the promised land of his own free will. So he had no heir but his slave Eleazer, who had indeed been born in his household, and was almost as dear as a son to him, but yet was not "his own." Abram was in deep depression.

¹ Matthew v. 42.

But his god knew how to relieve this weariness of spirit, which might easily have led to loss of faith. Yahweh, who had already appeared to him more than once, came to him again. It was night, and Abram heard Yahweh in a vision calling to him, "Fear not, Abram! I am your shield, and will give you a rich reward." But he answered in despair, "O Lord Yahweh! what fortune can you give me? I go on my way childless, and Eleazer will be my heir, for I have no children."

Such was his complaint; but the answer that fell upon his ear was beyond measure comforting: "Not your slave, but your own son shall be your heir." And when Yahweh led him out of his tent he saw that this promise was not meant for a mere idle word. It was a glorious night. The moon had not risen, and the stars twinkled by thousands in the sky. "Look up!" said Yahweh. "Can you count the stars? Even so countless shall your descendants be." And however wonderful this word appeared, yet Abram kept down the voice of doubt in his heart. Yahweh's promise was so sure! He could not help accepting it with firm belief. Thus rest was brought to his soul. All that had troubled him was gone, as if by a magic touch. He no longer thought of his fatherland with pain, no longer saw dangers all around him; and, as for the future, his posterity should possess Canaan. How could it be? Nay, that was as Yahweh should direct.

Now that his faith was established as to the main point, he was to gather the fruit of his trustfulness, and to learn how completely he had gained Yahweh's favour by it. "I Yahweh have brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees"—so his god went on to address him—"to give you this land for a heritage." Abram now believed in this promise without reserve; but he knew by experience how easily the shadow of doubt might fall upon his soul, so he answered, "Lord,

give me a sign, that I may know it certainly." And Yahweh granted the request.

By the direction of his god the patriarch was to make the needful preparations for a solemn sacrifice in confirmation of a treaty. For this purpose he took an ox of three years old, a goat and a ram of the same age, and a pair of doves. He cut each of the larger animals into two parts, but left the birds undivided; then he arranged all these parts upon the ground, the two halves of the same animal opposite each other. When the vultures and kites, attracted by the flesh, flew forward towards it, he chased these unclean creatures away. The bleeding flesh must lie there unpoluted, so that when Yahweh came to conclude the treaty he might pass between the parts.

In patient, but eager expectation, Abram watched till the sun went down. When it had vanished behind the horizon, a deep sleep fell upon him; all at once he was wrapped in darkness, but it was not the natural darkness of the night. Amazement laid hold of him; the thick black darkness in which Yahweh dwells closed round him and weighed upon his breast. Hark! it is the voice of Yahweh: "Know that your posterity shall sojourn in a strange land; there they shall be enslaved and oppressed. For three generations they shall remain among the strangers, because the measure of the sins of the Amorites, who are to be punished by your posterity, will not be full till then. But, though I leave them there to sigh so long, I will not forget my promise. And the people that oppress them shall fall under my avenging justice; the fourth generation shall rescue itself from the yoke of slavery, and shall return to this land, its heritage, laden with booty. As for you, O Abram, in a blessed old age you shall go to your fathers in peace and be buried."

Such was the promise of Yahweh that sounded from the darkness after the sun had set. But look! What is that

appearing suddenly like a smoking furnace and a flame of fire? Yahweh himself was there, and passed between the parts of the sacrificial animals to confirm his promise with an oath.

Thus Yahweh swore to Abram that his posterity should possess the whole land of Canaan, from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates, the land of the Kenites and of all the other tribes that were settled there.

There is one passage in this story that I have intentionally avoided rendering accurately, because there is a contradiction in it, that calls away the attention of anyone who notices it from the general drift of the story. When Yahweh is foretelling to Abram all that is to befall his posterity, and how they are to be oppressed in a strange land,—in saying which the writer is of course thinking of the slavery in Egypt—the promise is added that the fourth generation shall depart thence.¹ All this I told you, but did not add that side by side with it stands this other prophecy,² “for four hundred years shall the strangers oppress them.” These two predictions do not agree together, for the space of four generations is far less than that of four centuries. This contradiction shows how the story is put together from the work of two writers, one of whom (the older) estimated the length of the stay of the Israelites in Egypt at four generations,³ while the other put it at about four centuries.⁴ This little fact also shows us what free use an ancient Israelite author made of his materials, and how very uncritical people were in those days.

But this only refers to a point of minor importance; and we have one or two things of more consequence to notice in this story. To understand it rightly, we must remember

¹ v. 16.

² v. 13.

³ Exodus vi. 16, 18, 20, and elsewhere.

⁴ Exodus xii. 40.

that it was customary among the Israelites, as well as among other nations of antiquity, to confirm a treaty that was being made, by sacrifices. And as sacrificial animals, therefore, were slaughtered on these occasions, concluding a treaty was called "striking," or "slaying a treaty." Even we still use the expression, "to strike a bargain." It seems that the solemnities practised by the Israelites on such occasions were not always the same, but what is here described was one form of them. At any rate, it is referred to several times elsewhere.¹ They cut one or more beasts into halves, and laid the pieces along the two sides of the path by which the parties making the promise were to go, so that they would pass between these parts. The meaning of the ceremony, which was most likely expressed in words at the same time, appears to have been as follows: "May the fate of this sacrificial beast, hewn into two halves, fall upon him who violates this treaty and breaks this promise!" What the Israelites themselves were accustomed to do when they took their most solemn oaths, is here related of their god Yahweh. When he promised Abram a numerous posterity, he did so in the most solemnly impressive manner possible, by passing between the parts of all the animals suitable for a sacrifice, so that Abram might never doubt the certainty of his promise again.

The way in which Yahweh is here described gives us a glance into the ideas of the Israelites about their god. A terrific darkness is the first indication of his presence, for Yahweh dwells in the darkness.² For this reason there was no light in the inmost compartment of the temple, in the holiest place, where Yahweh was enthroned. Strangely in contrast with this is the form under which Yahweh himself appears—the flame of fire. This symbol occurs not only

¹ Jeremiah xxxiv. 18, 19; Genesis xxi. 27.

² Exodus xx. 21 Deuteronomy iv. 11.

in this passage, but in so many others as to make it perfectly evident that the Israelites thought of Yahweh under this form more than under any other, and believed the consuming fire to be the true expression of the being of their god.¹ As an illustration of this idea, I will quote part of a psalm,² containing a description of Yahweh coming to help his favourite. The age of the song, which is ascribed to David in the superscription, is uncertain, but at any rate it is from the time before the captivity.

I will praise thee, O Yahweh, my strength !
 Yahweh is my rock, my fortress, my deliverer.
 My god is my rock, on which I trust,
 My shield and the horn that saves me, my tower.
 When I cried "Praise ye Yahweh"
 I was saved from the might of my foes.
 Billows of death surrounded me.
 Streams of terror made me afraid.
 The bands of the shadow-land had already laid hold of me.
 The snares of death were round me.
 Then I cried to Yahweh in my distress,
 Yea, I cried aloud to my god.
 He heard my voice from his palace,
 And my cry broke through to his ear.
 Then the earth trembled and heaved,
 The roots of the mountains shuddered
 And heaved because he was wrath.
 Smoke rose up in his nostrils,
 A consuming fire from his mouth,
 Coals blazed forth from him.
 He bowed the heavens and came down
 With storm-clouds under his feet.
 He rode on a thunder-cloud and flew,
 And shot forth on the wings of the wind.
 He veiled himself in a mantle of darkness,
 And shrouded himself in dark waters and masses of cloud.
 By the brightness before him his clouds were broken,
 By hail and coals of fire.

¹ Isaiah iv. 5, x. 17, xxx. 27 ff., xxxi. 9, xxxiii. 14; Amos v. 6; Ezekiel viii. 2, x. 4, &c., &c.

² Psalm xviii. 1—17; 2 Samuel xxii. 2—18.

And Yahweh thundered in the heavens,
The voice of the Highest was heard.
He shot forth his arrows and scattered my foes,
Countless flashes of lightning to confound them.
The beds of the waters were uncovered,
The foundations of the earth laid bare,
At the rebuke of Yahweh,
At the blast of the breath of his nostrils.
He stretched out his hand from on high and took me,
He drew me forth from the stormy waters.
From my mighty foemen did he deliver me,
From those that hated me, and were stronger than I.

Such a description as this shows us how the religion of the Israelites, like that of other peoples, was at first a worship of nature, and how nothing made such a deep impression upon them as the thunder storm, with the flickering and flashing lightning. The thunder storm, therefore, more than anything else, made them think of the action of some higher power, and they thought of their god for the most part as a dreadful being who inspired them with terror, as a consuming fire. Gradually their religious life was more or less shaken free from the impressions caused by the phenomena of nature.

For us, such a representation of the deity has little or no value. At best it only speaks to our imagination and not to our heart. When we speak of the thunder as God's voice, and the lightning as his messenger, we are simply making use of a poetical form of speech, that has nothing to do with our real religious life; and, indeed, we should be shocked by such descriptions as that of the Psalm just quoted, if anyone of our own day were to give them as the genuine utterance of his own heart.

There is certainly progress here, but it is not genuine progress, unless our reverence for God is as great as ever. God's majesty is not revealed in nature alone. He speaks sternly to us too, in our consciences, in the severe

demands of the moral law, in the inexorable punishment he inflicts on sin, in the self-reproach and misery by which he teaches us that he cannot be "mocked."¹

Our god dwells in the darkness. He is a consuming fire. So spoke the ancient Israelite as he gazed, with a shudder, into the black gloom of night or the dark depths of the thunder clouds, and trembled as he saw the heavens all a-glow with lightning, as if wrapped in flames. Our god is a consuming fire, he said again in later times, when his conscience was troubled, and he felt ready to sink under the burden of his sins. Our god is a consuming fire²—that word still expresses an awful truth, felt by every man who understands the extent of his duty, who is weighed down by the thought of his trespasses, who knows not how he can be rescued from the black night that sometimes falls upon his soul.

He who has never felt anything like this is not able to enjoy as yet the full comfort of the faith that God is our Father.

CHAPTER XV.

HAGAR.

GEN. XVI.

ABRAM'S faith in the promise of Yahweh was severely tested; for ten years went by, after he had reached the land of Canaan, and still he had no hope of offspring. Then Sarai grew impatient, and began to wonder whether she was destined to be the mother of the future chief of Abram's tribe. For in promising a son to him, Yahweh had never promised one to her, and in her doubt and sadness she believed that she was never to have the joy

¹ Galatians vi. 7.

² Hebrews xii. 29.

of clasping a child of her own to her bosom ! But she could not acquiesce in this. She could not bear the thought of going down to the grave childless. No ! This misery, this shame—for so it was considered in Israel—must not be hers ! There was one way to escape it, a way which strikes us as very extraordinary, but in which there was nothing shocking to the ideas of antiquity or at variance with its customs. She gave her slave-girl to her husband as a secondary wife, intending, should she have any children, to adopt them as her own. Thus she tried, as the Israelites called it, “to build up her house by her slave-girl.” The slave who was thus made the wife of her master was Hagar, an Egyptian.

It is easy to imagine how unpleasant the relations between Hagar and her mistress gradually became. The servant, especially when she began to have hopes of being a mother, forgot more and more completely the respect she owed to Sarai, and began at last to treat her childless mistress with undisguised contempt. The latter complained of her conduct to Abram, and reproached him indirectly with paying the slave-girl too much honour. “May the reproach I suffer fall upon you !” she said, “Now that my slave is expecting to become a mother she despises me. May Yahweh judge between you and me !” Abram could only remind her of the authority she had over her own servant, and the mistress, now enraged by envy, made such ample use of it that Hagar could no longer endure the treatment she experienced, and forgetting that her flight would take away all her hopes of ever seeing her child exalted to the rank of Abram’s heir and the chief of his tribe, she left the tents of her master and set out for her own country.

But she had not got far on her journey before the angel of Yahweh met her by a well, on the way to the wilderness of Shur, and asked her where she came from and where she was going. She answered that she was trying to escape from

her mistress Sarai. But the angel said, "Go back to your mistress and humble yourself before her. If you find this hard to do, comfort yourself by thinking what the future has in store for you. I will give you countless descendants. The son to whom you are about to give birth shall be called Ishmael, that is *God hears*, for Yahweh has heard the complaint of your oppression. Your child will be a man like a wild-ass;¹ he will be against every one, and every one will be against him; and he will dwell to the east of all his brethren."

Then Hagar called the name of Yahweh, who had spoken to her, "Thou art a god that lets himself be seen," for she said, "Do I really live, after I have seen (him)?" So they call the well at which this meeting took place, the well Lahai-Roi. It lies between Kadesh and Bered. So Hagar went back to Abram and soon saw the angel's promise fulfilled, for she gave birth to a son, and called him "Ishmael."

The object of this story is to give an account of the Ishmaelites, as the Israelites called the wandering Arab tribes. It shows us that the Israelite did not deny his relationship to these Arabs, but looked upon them as his brethren, though he did not consider them his equals. According to him they were indeed Abram's children, but their mother was nothing but a slave. It was true that Ishmael was older than the forefather of the Israelites, or in plain language, that the Bedouins, or "sons of the desert," had existed as an independent people before the Israelites, and were their own masters when Israel still bowed beneath the yoke of slavery in Egypt; but their mother was an Egyptian, that is to say, they had not preserved the purity of their blood, but had intermarried with the Egyptians.

This legend, like many others, is associated with a par-

¹ After an amended version.

ticular spot. For the well Lahai-Roi, according to the story, owes its name to the appearance of the angel who foretold the future lot of her son to the Egyptian hand-maid. The statement that the well in question lies between Kadesh and Bered gives us but little help in finding it again, for the name of Bered is quite unknown to us. Nor does the repeated mention of the well in the stories about Isaac¹ bring us much further. Nor again does the name itself give us any indication about the well, for the real meaning of Lahai-Roi, which our writer seems to have translated "there is sight for the living," is uncertain. From very early times, however, the natives have pointed out a well a little to the south of Beersheba, which they call "the well of Hagar." Its position suits the direction of Hagar's flight from Hebron to the wilderness of Shur, which stretches along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, between the south-western border of Palestine and Egypt. We may therefore suppose this well to be the one intended.

Let us turn for a moment to the country and the people of the Ishmaelites!

Arabia is the name given to the vast extent of land washed on the south-west coast by the Red Sea, on the south-east by the Indian Ocean, on the north-east by the Persian Gulf, and bounded on the north by Palestine, Syria and the Euphrates. Geographers usually divide it into three parts, Arabia Felix, Arabia Petræa and Arabia Deserta, that is Fortunate Arabia, Stony Arabia and Desert Arabia, but the natives know nothing of this division. Arabia Felix is by far the greatest, for this name is given to the whole peninsula between the three seas just mentioned, while the extreme western corner only, together with the peninsula of Sinai and Mount Seir, is called Arabia Petræa, and the desert that lies between Palestine and the Euphrates, Arabia Deserta.

¹ Genesis xxiv. 62, xxv. 11.

This third portion of Arabia was the dwelling place of the Ishmaelites, of whose ancestor it was foretold, as we saw just now, that he should live to the east of all his brothers.¹ It is a hilly and desert land, lying rather high, and almost always scorched beneath a burning sun. Its vegetation is thin, and it swarms with serpents and beasts of prey. The wells are but few, and most of them are brackish and sulphurous, and in many cases most offensive to the smell. Sometimes the scorching and suffocating blast of the terrible Simoom sweeps over these steppes.

Of the tribes who inhabited this country twelve were known to the Israelites, and were called the sons of Ishmael by them.² Among these the Nabateans (Nebajoth) and the Kedarenes (Kedar) were the most important. The Israelites distinguished between these Ishmaelites and certain other Arab tribes, most of whom lived in Arabia Felix, but some of whom, such as the Midianites, were often to be found in Arabia Deserta or Petraea. They called these other Arabs the sons of Abram and Keturah.³

The angel told Hagar that Ishmael would be "a wild-ass of a man," and we may see what an Israelite understood by this expression from the addition, "his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him," and also from the following description of the animal to which he is compared, taken from the book of Job :⁴

Who has let the wild-ass go free,
And who has loosened his bonds ?
I (Yahweh) have made the wilderness his home,
And the barren moor-land his dwelling,
He scorns the wealth of the city ;
He heeds not the driver's cry,
He ranges the hills as his pasture,
And searches out every green thing.

¹ Genesis xvi. 12, xxv. 18, after an amended version.

² Genesis xxv. 13—18.

³ Genesis xxv. 1—4.

⁴ Job xxxix. 5—8.

Brave, free, and hardy, uncorrupted by luxury, but restless and rapacious,—such were the Bedouins. The land in which they lived had made them so; for but a small part of it was fit for cultivation, and though the inhabitants differed from each other in their modes of life, some dwelling in open villages and others in tents,¹ in no case could anything like cities be raised. Organised society could not exist where the population was for the most part unsettled; and the dryness of their country, in which one miserable well was considered a valuable possession, and many parts of which became absolutely uninhabitable for the time, if no rain fell, brought the various tribes into constant collision with each other; and want often drove them to make war upon one another, or to plunder the more fortunate regions that lay upon the borders of their desert. They were troublesome neighbours, therefore, and a great curse to the merchants; for they were constantly attacking their caravans, and could not well be subdued themselves on account of the ease with which they escaped on their swift camels and horses, and disappeared with all their possessions, on the approach of a hostile camp, into the heart of the desert, to which their enemies could hardly follow them.

A wild-ass of a man, and everyone's enemy! This is surely not an attractive picture, and if it is a faithful likeness we can have no great respect for the people it represents, since they must have stood low in the scale of development. "But," it may be said, "is it fair to throw the blame upon a tribe when the country in which it lived almost compelled it to lead a marauding life? We saw just now that the nature of their country made the Ishmaelites what they were. Was it their fault, then, that they were what their country made them?" Let us not deceive ourselves and each other! The character of a people, like that of an individual, is formed to

¹ Genesis xxv. 16, after an amended version.

a great extent by circumstances ; but for all that we are not guiltless if we allow ourselves to be drawn into sin by our surroundings. Each one's lot in life brings its special temptations with it, and each one must learn to overcome them. It is just the same with nations. The character of every country brings some temptation with it. A rich and fruitful land has an enervating effect upon its inhabitants, and makes them luxurious, lazy, and licentious ; just as a barren land, whose inhabitants have a hard struggle with nature, may easily make them rude, cruel, quarrelsome, restless, and rapacious. But no people must allow itself to be made bad by its climate and its circumstances. It must make itself master of them. It is no use saying that this is impossible ; for even if the poverty of a country, for instance, makes its inhabitants impatient, and sets them fighting with each other, yet after all they would overcome the difficulties with which they have to contend more easily, and would experience greater prosperity and enjoy more happiness, if they helped each other and joined together to rescue themselves by courage and perseverance from the dangers with which they are threatened by nature than if they went on making war upon each other. It is only by learning to resist such temptations as these, and to overcome the evil influence of circumstances, that a nation can become a blessing to mankind and a joy to itself.

A barren land and straightened circumstances may even benefit a people if it knows that there are other and better treasures than great flocks or swift horses, if it loves religion and goodness. But, in spiritual things, the Bedouins never excelled. The wants of the moment, the satisfaction of their daily necessities, were the points of chief importance with them. Their old religion, like that of the Israelites, was the worship of stars and stones. But no Moses rose among "the sons of the East" to teach a higher view of the

being and the service of the deity. Like so many other peoples, they went on standing where they had always stood, until they gradually ceased to care for spiritual things at all. From this people "like a wild ass" no light has streamed. It is true that the tribe from which Mohammed, the prophet of the Arabs, sprang boasted its descent from Ishmael, yet it was not among the wandering hordes of the north, but among the inhabitants of those regions in which agriculture and commerce were practised, and even there to a large extent under Israelite influences, that Islam rose.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH.

GEN. XVIII., XIX.

IN the remaining stories about Abram, this patriarch is always called Abraham, and his wife Sarah, not Sarai. The occasion of this change is told us in a story¹ (the principal contents of which we shall speak of in another chapter), in which it is said to have been commanded by God.

What "Abram" means we are not told; but "Abraham," according to this writer, is "the father of a multitude," and the name embodies the prophecy of a numerous posterity; many peoples and kings were to descend from him. The name "Sarah," no translation of which is given, may mean "princess." This change of names is reported not by the oldest writer, but in the Book of Origins. From this point, however, the compiler of the book of Genesis, who collected the different accounts together, has changed the names of Abram and Sarai into Abraham and Sarah in all the documents; and we shall follow his example.

¹ Genesis xvii.

First, then, we will tell the story of the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah. It runs as follows :—

When Abraham was living by the oak-tree of Mamre, he had repeated proofs of the favour with which he was regarded by Yahweh, the terrible avenger of wrong. Thus he was sitting one day, when the sun was at its hottest, in the door of his tent, when he saw at a little distance before him three men in whom he recognised at once his god Yahweh and two angels. It need not be said that he hastened to meet them, and, throwing himself upon the ground, addressed the foremost of the three with the words, “Lord! be gracious to me, and pass not by the dwelling of your servant. Let me wash your feet, and do you then lie down under the tree until the meal is ready, that I may set a piece of bread before you, to strengthen you for the rest of your journey. Surely it is for this that you have visited your servant.” The guests yielded to his invitation, and Abraham made haste to prepare a meal for them. He had modestly spoken of what he could set before them as “a piece of bread;” but, of course, he gave them the best he had, and a plentiful meal of cakes and meat, with fresh and curdled milk was soon prepared. According to the custom still prevalent in the East, Abraham did not join his illustrious guests at table, but waited on them himself.

After their meal, Yahweh asked where Sarah was; and when Abraham answered that she was in the tent, he declared “within a year I will come again, and then Sarah shall have a son.” Sarah, who was in the front part of the tent, laughed to herself, and thought, “I have a son, indeed! Impossible!” But though she was standing behind Yahweh, so that he could not even see the incredulous look upon her face, he knew exactly what she was doing and thinking. “Why is Sarah laughing?” he asked. “Does she think that anything is too wonderful for Yahweh? I tell you

again, at the appointed time I shall return, and then Sarah will have a son." Sarah now tried to make out that she had not been laughing, for she was afraid of Yahweh, but he would not allow himself to be deceived, and said again "you did laugh."

Then the three men rose and went towards Sodom, while Abraham made ready to accompany them. He little knew what he was now to hear.

Yahweh had fearful things on hand, and could not refrain from telling Abraham all that was going to happen. Should he conceal from Abraham, the ancestor of so many mighty peoples, Abraham whose fortune would become proverbial among all nations, what he was now about to do? "No!" he thought, "Abraham must know it; for did not I choose him for my friend, that he might teach all his posterity to serve me and to deal justly? For only on these conditions can I fulfil my glorious promises to him. Abraham, then, must be told what is about to happen."

So Yahweh said to Abraham, "There is a rumour of gross wickedness in Sodom and Gomorrah, and I am going to see whether the measure of it is full, that I may know what I must do!" When Yahweh had thus declared his intention, his two companions went on their way to Sodom, but he himself still staid behind.

Abraham was deeply troubled, and ventured to come forward to plead for the sinful cities. He could not but admit the truth of the accusation. Yes! Sodom and Gomorrah were full of ungodliness; he could not contradict it. But yet. . . . "Lord!" said he, "You will not destroy the righteous together with the ungodly? Perhaps there may be fifty good men in the city, would not you spare it for their sake? Nay! I know it full well, you, the judge of all the earth, will surely do no wrong. You will not suffer the pious to perish with the ungodly." Moved by this entreaty,

Yahweh answered, "Well! If there are fifty righteous men in Sodom, I will forgive the whole city for their sake." Abraham might now rejoice in the success of his mediation, but the fear came over him that even yet his intercession might prove fruitless. "See," he reluctantly began, "I have ventured to speak to the Lord, though I am but dust and ashes, and . . . suppose there were just five short of the fifty! Would the city be destroyed for want of them." And Yahweh's answer reassured him, for he said, "If I can find but five and forty good men in the city, I will spare it." This was a great point gained, but still Abraham went on, and asked, "But what if there were only forty?" and when he had received the same answer as before, he began again: "Lord! be not angry! . . . but suppose there were only thirty?" "Even for them will I spare Sodom," was the gracious reply of Yahweh. Encouraged by his clemency, the patriarch put the case that the godless city might contain but twenty pious men, and then even brought the number down to ten, and Yahweh promised him that he would forgive the whole city if he found ten righteous men in it. It was with feelings of relief and hopefulness that Abraham saw Yahweh depart upon his way.

But his hopes were idle. In all Sodom there were not so many as ten men whose sinfulness did not cry to heaven! This soon became apparent to the two angels who had gone to look into the matter. When they reached Sodom they were asked by Lot, who was sitting at the gate of the city, to be his guests. But when at last they yielded to his repeated and pressing request, and accepted his frank invitation, all the inhabitants of the city, "from the oldest to the youngest," collected together, and, in violation of the most sacred laws of hospitality, threatened the strangers with violence. No further proof was required. The messengers of Yahweh need not go into any closer examination

of the affair. Lot was the only righteous man, and Sodom must be destroyed.

Before the angels began the work of destruction, they uttered the words of warning to Lot, "Leave the city, with all your relatives," and added "Make haste, for we are sent by Yahweh to execute his avenging justice." In vain Lot visited his sons-in-law and foretold the destruction of their country to them. They heeded not; and at daybreak the angels urged him to make haste, and said, "Leave them all behind if they will not go with you. Take your wife and your two unmarried daughters and escape, or you will perish with the rest." Lot could hardly make up his mind to leave all his other relatives to their fate, but the angels compelled him to do so, and led him with his family outside the city, for Yahweh had mercy on him.

Once more they urged him to make haste. "Fly," said they, "for your life. Look not back, and rest not in all the valley of Siddim, but fly to the mountain, or you will perish!" Lot was now fully convinced that he must make the utmost speed, and cried, "Ah! my lords! you have been so good to me as to spare my life; now redouble your goodness to me! It may be too late for me to escape to the mountain; destruction will come upon me and I shall die. But this city here is close by, and it is but a little one. Let me find a refuge there!" His prayer was granted. The avenging angels promised that this little city should be spared for his sake, but they urged him to make all the greater speed, for they could do nothing till he was in Zoar. From this prayer of Lot the city took its name of Zoar, that is "little one."

When the sun rose and Lot drew near to Zoar, Yahweh rained brimstone and fire from heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and so destroyed not only the cities themselves but the whole valley of Siddim with all its inhabitants. Lot

escaped ; but his wife was so foolish as to disobey the angels and look behind her, whereupon she was changed in a moment into a pillar of salt.

That morning Abraham stood once more on the spot where he had entreated Yahweh to have mercy on the godless cities, and he soon saw that his intercession had been of no avail. A cloud of smoke, like that of a kiln, rose from the whole country in which Sodom and Gomorrah had stood, and told him of the dreadful fate that had fallen on these cities and of Yahweh's avenging justice.

Let us make ourselves more closely acquainted with the place to which this story carries us.

In the south-east of Palestine there is a sea, about forty miles long, and, on an average, nine miles broad, which was usually called by the Israelites "the Salt Sea." Its many peculiarities have always excited the greatest interest, and within the last forty years it has more than once been made the subject of scientific investigations. A promontory, of considerable size, runs into it from its south-east coast, but otherwise its oval form is nearly unbroken. It forms a continuation of the valley of the river Jordan, which enters it from the north, but does not leave it again at the south ; all the waters of this river, therefore, together with those of the numerous but for the most part inconsiderable streams that enter the sea from the east and west, evaporate from this great basin. It is surrounded on all sides by hills which reach close up to the water on the eastern side, but are separated from it by rather a broad strand on the west. This strand, like the plains to the north and south, is bald and sterile, and everything on it is covered with a crust of saltpetre. This is the result of the exhalations of the waters of the sea, which are extraordinarily salt. At some seasons of the year, moreover, great quantities of asphalt or bitumen float on the surface of

the sea, and give a leaden appearance to the whole sheet of water. At the south-west corner a rock of salt, about five miles long, but not very high, rears itself. It is called "the hill of Sodom" or "the stone of Sodom." Round its edge all kinds of petrified formations of salt appear, sometimes of the grotesquest shape, and after a time they plunge back into the sea, or undergo great changes from the exhalations of the water and the influence of rain and sunshine.

Love of exaggeration has still further increased the gloominess of this scene. It has often been declared that the vapours rising from the water form a heavy pestilential cloud that never passes away, that no living creature can stay near it, that the birds that try to fly across it fall down into it dead, and that its waters are never stirred by the wind. All this is gross exaggeration. The fact that the district is inhabited, though but thinly owing to its barrenness, is sufficient to show that the exhalations of the water are not poisonous. Besides, whole days have been spent upon the sea itself or in journeys along its coasts by travellers. Nor is it true that storms are unknown there. But it is undeniable that the Salt Sea has a dismal aspect, and it is not without reason that it is called the Dead Sea.

Now the origin of this "Dead Sea" is the subject of our story. The southern portion of the sea, we are told, was once called the valley of Siddim, and was then a fruitful plain. Several towns were built upon it, the best known of which were Sodom and Gomorrah, while others bore the names of Admah, Zeboim, and Bela or Zoar.¹ Several of the Israelite writers,² and some other ancient authors, speak of the devastation of this region by earthquakes and subterranean fire. The great quantity of bitumen that is found there, largely

¹ Genesis xiv. 2 ; Deuteronomy xxix. 23.

² Jeremiah xx. 16, xxiii. 14, xlix. 18, l. 40 ; Lamentations iv. 6 ; Zephaniah ii. 9, &c.

composed of petroleum, makes the occurrence of these terrible phenomena quite credible. It seems therefore that the tradition of which we are speaking is a true one.

The recollection of such a devastation would not easily be blotted out from this region that had suffered so much at the hands of nature. The gloomy spectacle furnished by the sea, as it lay between its salt-bound shores, was constantly calling the havoc of a by-gone age to mind, and, to those ancient spectators who saw the hand of an avenging deity in all the destructive agencies of nature, it told of wrath and chastisement. Here was food enough for the imagination ! That little city Zoar, on the south-east coast, appeared to have been spared through special favour, for the destruction must have swept round it on three sides. What was the reason of this ? If we make the inquiry in a scientific spirit we see that the strip of land on which it lay was on a higher level than that of the rest of the plain, so that when the plain became a prey to fire, and the water of the northern part of the sea overflowed into it, this piece of land very naturally remained above water. But in ancient times they never thought of this explanation, and saw a sign of God's favour in the fact that the city had escaped. Grotesque pillars of salt were to be found in abundance by the Hill of Sodom, and imagination often traced the petrified human form in them.

Thus other legends, besides the one we have given, would doubtless spring up among those who lived on the shores of the sea. We have seen already how rumour has exaggerated its dismal nature. About the beginning of our era the people of the neighbourhood spoke of thirteen cities that had been destroyed. We will take one more example of this kind of thing !

The Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, tells us that fruit grows on the shores of the Dead Sea all full of ashes.

“They look as if they were fit to eat,” he writes, “but if anyone takes hold of them with his hand they break up into dust and ashes.” The Roman historian, Tacitus, refers to the same thing. The origin of this story of the “apples of Sodom” appears to be found in the fact that a certain kind of fruit really does grow in the neighbourhood which becomes soft as it ripens, but which bursts with a clap when squeezed, and leaves nothing but a thin shell and a few fibres in the hand. In the substance of this fruit, the legend saw the ashes of the cities that had perished.

Our writer selected two of these local traditions and brought them into connection with the patriarch he desired to glorify.

But what an extraordinary idea of his god he had ! And what strange contradictions there are in his representations of him ! On the one hand, Yahweh is a most exalted being who sees the future and knows all that is in the heart of man,—a god for whom nothing is too wonderful, and who acts as the judge of all the earth ; but, on the other hand, this same god is also represented not only as conversing confidentially with Abraham, but even as eating and drinking, with his angels, in the patriarch’s tent. These two sets of ideas can hardly be said to harmonise with each other. The only way of explaining this inconsistency is to suppose that the writer, in working up into a single whole certain old legends about Abraham’s dealings with Yahweh and the promises he received from this god, together with stories about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, tried to preserve all the features of the old accounts, but, at the same time, involuntarily ascribed to the god, whose actions he was describing, the attributes which he himself believed him to possess.

The later writer of the stories of the patriarchs says that

Lot was spared "because God remembered Abraham,"¹ but this is not the idea of the ancient legend itself, which was better understood by one of the New Testament writers,² who declared Lot to have been a righteous man, rescued because of his piety. No doubt Lot stands far below Abraham in our story, but still he is a man who deserves to find favour in the eyes of Yahweh. He offers the most liberal hospitality to the angels, and when they, in return, warn him of the coming destruction he gives heed to them at once. Not only does he rise far above the godless inhabitants of the place in which he lived, but his readiness to leave all he had contrasts favourably with the unbelief of his sons-in-law. For his sake, therefore, Zoar was spared.

While Lot is the believer who hastens to escape the coming destruction, his wife who looks behind her in her flight, and is therefore changed into a pillar of salt, is also a believer, but only half-hearted in her faith. Why must she not look back? Perhaps the idea that lies at the bottom of this prohibition is the thought, familiar also to heathen antiquity, that the higher powers will not suffer themselves to be watched when at work. But it may be that it contains the idea borrowed from it by the Gospel of Luke³ that he whose heart still clings to his possessions in the day of God's judgment, so that he cannot unhesitatingly leave everything that he has to save himself, is but half a believer and will be destroyed with the rest.

The noblest figure in all the scene is that of Abraham, the trusted friend of Yahweh, from whom he will conceal nothing, because the patriarch must teach his offspring to fear him, Abraham the humble, faithful advocate of the unhappy country. It need not be said that the way in which Abraham prays, constantly beating down the demands of the retributive justice of his god, and persuading him to

¹ Genesis xix. 29.

² 2 Peter ii. 7, 8.

³ Luke xvii. 32.

offer more and more favourable terms, cannot be made the model of our prayers, but this is an objection to the writer's idea of God rather than to his account of Abraham's piety. Deep sympathy with the doomed cities is expressed in his bold but humble intercession. It is a noble thing to "say a good word" for others, however wicked they are, and however much we hate their wickedness; for it shows that we love our fellow-men.

It was very natural that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah should pass into a proverbial expression for any terrible disaster among the Israelites; natural, too, that together with the flood, it should become the type of God's severest judgments, in the writings of the early Christians.¹ Nor is this injurious to the religious and moral life if only we clearly understand that when so used it is an emblem of the terrible consequences of sin, and nothing more; but the superstitious view of the phenomena of nature which lies at the basis of this story, and about which we spoke when treating of the flood, is very hurtful to our inner life.

The volcanic eruptions, the earthquakes, the explosions of the naptha wells, and the way in which they had changed the country from a fruitful plain to a salt sea with barren shores,—all this spoke to the ancient inhabitants of the district of the punishments of God; and the aspect of the Dead Sea ever reminded them that their god was a consuming fire who could punish them in fearful ways. So if one of our rivers overflowed its banks in spring time, and its waters, tumbling over the fruitful land, converted it into a swamp, and caused incalculable misery to the inhabitants, we might imagine that the sufferers were more sinful than those who lived on the other side, and who were rescued by the very fact of the river having overflowed on the side removed from them. But this is a miserable idea, for it not only

¹ Luke xvii. 28, 29.

makes us slothful in discovering and applying the best means of preventing or avoiding the danger, but it is apt to make those that escape self-satisfied; and in any case produces a fear of God that may indeed lead to a slavish obedience and a cringing submission, but can never be united with a free surrender of the heart to God or genuine love of Him. For love is cast out by fear.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SON OF THE PROMISE.

GEN. XXI. 1-21.

A BRAHAM'S faith in the repeated promises of his god was not put to shame by the event. For what both he and Sarah had thought impossible until it was promised to them really happened; his wife at ninety years of age became the mother of a son, and he was called Isaac, that is, *the laughter*. In child-like joy Sarah exclaimed when he was born: "God will make them all laugh at what has happened to me. Everyone who hears of it will laugh. Who will go and tell Abraham Sarah gives children suck? For even in his old age have I borne him a son!"

It was not customary in ancient times for a child to be completely weaned till it was about three years old. When Isaac had reached this age, the event was celebrated by a festal gathering. Then Sarah looked round her with a mother's pride, and her eye fell upon Ishmael, who was happy, playing. He was an eyesore to her. Had he not been treated but now as Abraham's heir and the future chief of the tribe? And yet his mother was nothing but an Egyptian slave! As long as she had had no son herself she had smothered her vexation, and was even glad to have this other child, though only hers by adoption. But now she

had a son of her own. The reign of the slave child must come to an end. He was not the son of the promise. Away with him !

Sarah "the princess" went in wrath to her husband. "Drive out this slave and her son," she cried, "for the child of a serf shall never share my son's inheritance !" Abraham was grieved by this violent demand, not so much for Hagar's sake as for Ishmael's, who was, after all, his son. He hesitated, therefore, to comply with Sarah's desires. But in the night his god appeared to him and said: "Let not the request of Sarah trouble you. You need feel no anxiety for your son and his mother. The descendants of Isaac shall indeed be called especially after you, but I will make a mighty people of the posterity of the slave-girl's child as well, because he is your son."

Thus persuaded and urged to compliance, Abraham called Hagar to him in the morning, and told her of this sentence of banishment. He gave her bread and water for the journey through the desert; and she took her child upon her shoulder, and entered the desert of Beersheba.

Poor Hagar ! How had she fallen ! Ever since Isaac's birth she had seen the arm uplifted that struck her now ; but the blow fell none the less heavily for that. In her imagination her son had been the heir, nay even the tribal chief, and now . . . rejected ! All the glory of which she had dreamed had vanished ! Alone with her child she entered the inhospitable desert—an exile.

She pursued her way until the water was all gone, and then there was nothing left her but to die. What did she care for that ? All joy in life had ceased for her, and as for her son, what enjoyment could he ever taste—the disinherited ! But yet she could not look on him while he died of thirst. So she laid him under a bush, and threw herself down a bowshot off, so as not to hear his cries. But now

her strength and spirit were exhausted too—her mother's heart was so deeply smitten—and she burst into tears.

Consolation was near the mourner. God had compassion on her son, and his angel cried to her: "Hagar! why do you weep? Your son, rejected as he is, is not forgotten by God even here. Raise him up and support him; and despair not of his future lot, for he is the father of a great people."

Thus encouraged, Hagar raised herself; and now that her eyes were cleared by hope, she saw a spring. Life smiled upon her once more for her child's sake. She soon refreshed the fainting Ishmael, and then she pursued her journey.

In the desert of Paran Hagar and her son continued to dwell, and God protected the boy, and he grew up in the hardy life of the desert, and became a skilful archer. His mother took him a wife from Egypt.

So Ishmael, as Abraham's son, was saved and blessed; but, as the son of a slave, he could not be his father's heir, but must yield to the son of the promise.

Is this touching story a legend too? Undoubtedly. This appears not only from the repeated mention of immediate communications from God, in a dream or by the appearance of an angel, which always show that we have the work of imagination or invention before us, but also from the fact that Ishmael, according to the foregoing narratives,¹ must have been seventeen years old three years after Isaac's birth, and was therefore no longer a lad that his mother could carry, as is here supposed.²

In many points this story resembles that of Hagar's flight, of which we have spoken already,³ though they are not both

¹ Genesis xvii. 24, 25; xxi. 5.

² Vv. 14, 15, 18, 20.

³ Pp 162—169.

by the same writer. In either case we are placed in the desert of Beersheba, and by a well. The chief point in both stories is the prophecy of Ishmael's future greatness, though he is not to be as great as Isaac. Just as in the other account Hagar is expressly called the Egyptian woman, to signify that the Arabs had mixed themselves with the Egyptians, so it is told us here, with the same object, that Ishmael's mother took him an Egyptian wife. There is one point, however, besides the form, in which they differ from each other; for in this story no mention is made of the wildness of the Bedouins, referred to in the other; the only allusion to the mode of life of the inhabitants of the desert is contained in the statement that Ishmael was celebrated as a skilful bowman. Nor is it said—though people have often seen it there¹—that Ishmael had behaved insolently, or had irritated Sarah by mocking or teasing his younger brother; it is simply stated that he laughed or played.² The whole story expresses goodwill towards Ishmael.

But high above him, in the writer's estimation, stands Isaac, the son of the promise, for whom the slave child has to make room. This is the main idea of the legend. The writer makes Sarah imperious past bearing, and cruel to her slave in the extreme, and Abraham shamefully weak; for who would drive out a woman and her child, helpless and unattended, into the desert? But he does not think about all this. Before his eyes stands nothing but the picture of the son of promise, for whose sake the son of the slave must be expelled. In this he saw the presage of the higher privileges granted to Israel "the chosen people" above the Ishmaelites. Although the people of Yahweh was younger, yet it rose far above the inhabitants of the desert, and advanced towards a more glorious and blessed future.

Centuries after this narrative had been written, one of

¹ Galatians iv. 29.

² Genesis xxi. 9.

the greatest of the followers of Jesus, Paul, was thinking it over. Ishmael, the son of the slave, who was expelled by the divine command in order that Isaac, the child of the free woman, might inherit Abraham's blessing, floated before his mind, and it seemed to him as if this old history foreshadowed something similar, which he saw going on in his own days. For the Jews in his time bowed down beneath the yoke of the law, and were therefore like Ishmael, the son of the slave. The Christians, on the other hand, were delivered from the pressure of the law, and so might be considered children of a free mother. Just as Isaac was the child to whom all the promises of God belonged, while Ishmael had to make way for him, so too the Jews must take a lower place than the Christians who received God's greatest blessings.¹

Is it true that there are such "children of the promise?" Is it true that one man is more richly blessed with spiritual gifts than another—that one people throws another into the shade—that one community rises above another in its religious capabilities? Is it true that the older is sometimes pushed aside by the younger who is more richly gifted than he? All this is true without a doubt. There are men, communities, peoples who are, as it were, chosen by God to play an important part in the world, whose dispositions are nobler than those of others, and who, when under circumstances favourable to their development, easily surpass those who have shone before them. So was Israel, "the people of religion," pushed aside by Christianity. So did the Greeks and Romans far outstrip the Eastern peoples as Christians. So again did their light pale, in its turn, before that of the Germans when the reformation of the sixteenth century took place. Nay, a fresh generation ought always to rise above that which has preceded it. This should be so from the

¹ Galatians iv. 21—31.

very fact that it learns from the older generation, and, as it were, stands upon its shoulders. But the path by which mankind advances towards its golden age has many windings. It often seems to keep at the same distance from the goal, and sometimes even to lead further away from it, rather than to draw nearer to it. But ever and again there stand up men in whose heart God's voice sounds clearer, who tower above other men in insight, love, and piety, and by their faith give mankind a fresh impulse forward. These are "the children of the promise," for the world is blessed by them, and others must make way for them.

"But in God's dealings there is much that is strange! According to this God seems to be partial!" He does. Did you expect to find it a simple thing to see into all His ways of educating the world?

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LAST ORDEAL.

GEN. XXII. 1—19.

ABRAHAM had already given the brightest proof, on many occasions, that he was ready to obey his god in all things. For at his command he had left his fatherland; trusting in his protection, he had wandered all through Canaan; nay, had he not, though it cut him to the heart, cast out his own son Ishmael at the same high command? But his god was not yet satisfied. He determined to try his servant yet once more, and this last trial should be a hard one.

Once on a time, while Abraham was still at Beersheba, his god appeared to him and cried "Abraham!" "Here am I, Lord, prepared to serve thee," was the patriarch's

ready answer. But how his ears tingled when he heard the command: "Take your son, your only son, your loved one, Isaac; go with him to the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains that I will show you!"

However dreadful this command might sound, it was no unheard-of thing, for Abraham knew that the Canaanites often slew their children and burnt them upon their altars in honour of their deities, for they believed it to be the way to serve these gods and to show their absolute devotion to them. But Abraham had never thought that Yahweh too desired such a sacrifice. And yet the command was plain, and it was not for him to ask the reason. He had only to obey, and obey he would.

So he rose early on a certain day and saddled his ass. Two servants and his son were to go with him. They cut some wood for a sacrifice, and everything was soon in readiness for the journey upon which they were to start. It took them two days to reach the place of their destination. Leaving the mountains of Judah on the left, they journeyed northward, by Hebron and Bethlehem, until at last, on the third day, Abraham saw Mount Zion in the distance. Then he told his slaves to stay behind with the ass. "My son and I," he said, "will go to that mountain to worship our god, and then come back to you." The sacrifice he had to make was harder than words could say, but there was no need that any human eye should watch his agony in making it.

So the last part of the journey was performed on foot. The two went on together, through the valley of the Rephaites, over the low range of hills that parts that plain from the valley of the sons of Hinnom, then down again,—and the dry limestone ridge, the most northern peak of which had been indicated to the obedient friend of God as the place of sacrifice, stood right before them.

The two went on together, the boy bending beneath the weight of the wood that was to consume the sacrifice, the father with the pan of fire and the sacrificial knife.

The two went on together; the father silent and sad at heart. The voice of doubt kept speaking, "Can Yahweh demand such a sacrifice? My son! my only son! It is too much to require." But it was his god who asked it, it was that awful god, that consuming fire! How could he open his mouth against him to complain? Must Yahweh render an account of what he did? Was he not God, and could he not ask whatever he would? Be still, rebellious heart; for this must be!

The two went on together; the son careless and happy, full of enjoyment of life, full of health and strength, but yet more or less subdued by the character of the landscape, by the solemnity they had come to perform in solitude, and by the gloomy silence of his father. Not that his father's silence surprised him, for Yahweh was a terrible god, a god that must be appeased by bloody sacrifices; the whole aspect of nature round about them, too, was gloomy, and that white mount that rose so steep before them out of the valley looked to him like the dwelling place of a stern Being.

So the two went up the mount together, till Isaac broke the silence all at once by crying in surprise: "Why, father!"—"What is it, my son?" was Abraham's reply.—"We have the fire and the wood," said the boy, "but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?"—Poor father! The question pierced like a dagger to his heart. Where was the lamb for the sacrifice? asked the innocent child. What was he to say to him? As long as he could he would conceal from his child the terrible demand of his stern god. Be still, complaining heart! "Our god himself will provide a lamb, my son!" was his mysterious reply.

So the two went on together.

Go on, thou faithful servant ! It is a word of truth that thou hast uttered ! God will indeed himself provide a lamb. He will not accept the sacrifice that you intend to offer !

When they had reached the top of the mountain Abraham built an altar in the place that had been pointed out to him, arranged the wood upon it, bound his son Isaac and laid him on the pile. But as he stretched out his hand to slay him, the angel of Yahweh cried to him from heaven, "Abraham ! Abraham !" Even as when his god appeared to him to give that frightful order he had now almost fulfilled, so now the patriarch replied, "Here am I ;" and a ray of hope broke through to his soul. Could it be that Yahweh was satisfied by his willingness, and would not have him actually perform the sacrifice ?

Aye ! Lift up your head, O Abraham, and rejoice. Let that dull glare, through which the soul of a fanatic speaks, depart out of your eye, and let the glow of thankful joy come in its stead ! Your god did but try your faith. Listen ! "Lay not your hand upon the lad, nor do him any harm ; for now I know that you fear God, and hold not back your only son from me." His son was delivered, as though given him a second time ! He was soon unbound, was standing at his father's side, and the two were hanging upon each other's necks. "Praised be Yahweh who has taken the will for the deed !"

There stood the altar ! The wood was all in order. The fire was ready burning. The knife was whetted. Well might Isaac ask, "Where is the lamb ?" If they had but an animal with them now to sacrifice, how gladly they would offer it. The spot on which they stood was holy ground ; Yahweh was present there ; what would they not have given for a beast to sacrifice. And, lo ! in the background Abraham perceived a ram, with his horns entangled in the brush-

wood, as if brought to the place and kept a prisoner there by God himself. So even this last wish was fulfilled. In a moment he had seized the ram and offered it in the place of his son.

As the smoke of the sacrifice rose on high the patriarch bowed down in prayer, and said, "This place must be called Yahweh shall appear!"¹ Then the angel of Yahweh called to him again: "I swear, says Yahweh, that because you have done this thing, and have not spared your son, your only son, that I will bless you and make your offspring countless as the stars of heaven and as the sand upon the sea shore. Your posterity shall rule over their enemies, and all the peoples of the earth shall bless themselves in the name of your descendants;² they shall say: God make us blessed as the tribe of Abraham! All this shall come to pass because you have been obedient."

Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they all went back to Beersheba together.

The remembrance of this event is still preserved in the name of the mountain, "Yahweh will appear."³ The spot upon which Abraham had shown his readiness was held sacred ever after, and was even considered worthy of supporting the great sanctuary of Israel, the temple, where Yahweh dwelt in darkness, and was honoured by the songs of praise and the offerings of his worshippers.

The most various nations of antiquity practised the horrible rite, still found here and there amongst uncivilised tribes, of sacrificing human beings, and especially children, in honour of the deities. It is undeniable that this was the case with Israel too, and our story furnishes a contribution to our knowledge of the custom. For though the chief object

¹ After an amended version.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

of the story is evidently to glorify Abraham's unlimited obedience, yet it surely would not have taken this form if the custom of sacrificing children had never been observed. However horrible the subject may be, we must try to discover how the practice came into existence; and it is not very hard to do so.

For whenever anyone offered a sacrifice to express his thankfulness, or to make atonement for a sin he had committed, he went upon the idea that this present would be pleasing to the deity, and would dispose him favourably towards the offerer. The idea that the matter of chief importance was the disposition of the heart occurred, indeed, to some few who were in advance of their times, but was, generally speaking, unknown to the ancients. They imagined their god to be like themselves in thinking more of a great than of a small present. He valued an animal more than a sheaf of corn, and a sheep more than a pigeon. He preferred an ox to a sheep, and was better pleased with a man who brought him ten oxen than with another who only brought him one. And on solemn occasions an immense number of animals were accordingly slaughtered and burnt. Thus Solomon sacrificed a great number of oxen and sheep at the consecration of the temple.¹ We need not be surprised, therefore, to find people trying to raise the value of their sacrifices by considering not only their number but also their nature, and arguing that since a man is of far more value than an animal the deity must set a higher value on the sacrifice of a human being, a prisoner of war, for example, or a slave, than on that of a number of animals. And so at last it came to their offering up the most precious of all possessions—their own children. Great thankfulness and, above all, a growing sense of guilt must have led them to this terrible extreme.

¹ 1 Kings viii. 5.

That this is really the way in which people learned to make such horrible sacrifices appears from these words of the prophet Micah,² amongst others :—

Wherewith shall I come before Yahweh,
and bow me before the high God?
Shall I come before him with offerings,
with bullocks of one year old?
Will Yahweh be pleased with thousands of rams,
with countless rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my sin,
my own child, to obtain forgiveness?
No ! He has shown you, O man, what is good,
and what Yahweh requires of you.
It is to do right, to hold justice dear,
and to walk humbly with your god.

Such words give us a glance into the religious life of the Israelites of the eighth century before Christ. The prophet does indeed reject the sacrifice of a firstborn child, but he does so not because it is something horrible in itself, but simply because, like sacrifices of oxen and of oil, it is insufficient to cover the guilt of man, since Yahweh asks nothing but justice and humility.

While many of the neighbours of the Israelites sacrificed children to their gods, and the custom was indeed followed by many Israelites, and even observed as a part of the Yahweh-worship, our writer preaches on the other hand that Yahweh only demanded the sacrifice of his son from Abraham in order to test his faith, and being satisfied by the patriarch's willingness to make the offering, took care himself that there should be a ram as a substitute for Isaac on the very spot where Abraham gave proof of his obedience.

This spot was the mount of the temple. In retelling the legend I have brought out this point quite clearly, but, as the story stands in Genesis, this information is not given us in so unmistakeable a form. Indeed the place of the

² Micah vi. 6, 7.

sacrifice is described so indefinitely that the interpreters are not yet agreed as to its position. The story speaks of "one of the mountains in the land of Moriah" or "one of the mountains of Moriah;" but though Moriah, as a name of the mount of the temple, was in use in the last centuries before Christ, yet it only appears in one other passage in all the Old Testament.¹ Everywhere else the mount of the temple is called Zion. Now, since "the hill of Moreh" appears as a place near Shechem,² some people have transferred the scene of the sacrifice thither, especially as "the oak tree of Moreh" is mentioned in the stories of Abraham as the sanctuary of Shechem.³ It is quite possible that some more ancient legend lies at the bottom of our story, according to which Abraham performed at Shechem some action similar to the one here described. But, in the account as we have it, the reference is certainly to the mount of the temple, which is called especially the mountain of Yahweh. The writer tries to give an explanation of the name "Moriah," which he translates "appearance of Yahweh." So the writer of the book of Chronicles sees in the same name a reference to Yahweh's appearing to David⁴

Yahweh—such was the writer's intention in this story—who dwells in the temple and has chosen Mount Moriah as his favourite place of revelation, Yahweh might demand the sacrifice of a firstborn, nay of an only son, just as other gods have done. Indeed he does really desire that his worshippers should be willing to make this offering. But he does not insist on the sacrifice being actually performed, for on the mount of the temple he has appointed a beast to take the place of a human child.

The idea that God can ever ask such a sacrifice from us never even comes into our minds; but yet the disposition

¹ 2 Chronicles iii. 1.

² Judges vii. 1.

³ Genesis xii. 6.

⁴ See the passage quoted above, 2 Chronicles iii. 1.

that revealed itself in that custom, horrible as it seems, inspires every true believer still. We must be ready to give up all things, even what is dearest to us, to God; for we must love him more than friends or relatives, more than our own life; nay, we must hold him dearer than our very children.

Thus if in times of persecution a man urges his own son to endure death rather than be faithless to the truth, he offers his child as a sacrifice.

If a father urges his son to risk his life for his neighbour, when some occasion requires him to do so, while his heart bleeds at the thought of his child's offering himself up and being taken away from him, he is making the sacrifice of Abraham.

God often requires great sacrifices from us. He would have us hold all things cheap for his sake and truth's sake, for the triumph of right and the salvation of mankind; and though he does not always take what we are willing to give, though we may even, as a rule, enjoy much happiness while still fighting for him, yet we must be prepared to accomplish even what is hardest, to sacrifice even what is dearest, if he requires it.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PURCHASE OF THE CAVE OF MACHPELAH.

GEN. XXIII.

WHILE Abraham was living at Kirjath-arba (afterwards Hebron), Sarah died at the age of a hundred and twenty-seven. As soon as the days of mourning were over, Abraham requested the chiefs of the Hethites, to whom the country belonged, to grant him an interview. They invited him, therefore, to meet them at the gate of Kirjath-arba, and when he came he addressed them thus: "I dwell amongst you as a stranger, and therefore possess no land; but let me have a

tomb amongst you in which to bury my dead." This request was favourably received by the Hethites. "Dear sir," they said, "you dwell amongst us like a prince of God. Bury your dead in the best of our graves; for there is not one of us who would refuse you his." Touched by their kindness, and grateful for their readiness to grant his request, Abraham bowed down before the Hethites; but he did not accept their offer to place the corpse of Sarah in one of their graves, as he wished to have a burying place of his own. So he said: "If you are so good as to allow me to bury my dead amongst you, then plead my cause with Ephron the son of Zohar to let me have the cave of Machpelah, that lies on his estate, at its proper price, for a family burying place." Now Ephron himself was sitting there, as an elder, among the rest, and he answered at once, in the hearing of all present, by offering the cave and the land on which it lay as a present to Abraham. But Abraham, turning to him and assuring him that he had rather buy the land, begged him to name its price; upon which Ephron made the courtly answer: "Nay, do but listen! What matters a piece of land, worth no more than some four hundred shekels, between men of substance like ourselves? Bury your dead there!" So Abraham learned the value of the land and at once weighed out four hundred shekels in the currency, and so became the owner of the cave, together with the land that belonged to it and all the timber that was growing on it.

Then Abraham buried his wife in this cave, which lies in the land of Canaan, to the east of Mamre, that is, Hebron. So Abraham bought this piece of land, the cave of Machpelah, from the Hethites, for a family burying place.

In itself all this is of little interest; but the writer evidently attached the greatest importance to it, for it is almost the only story about the patriarchs that is given with any

detail in the Book of Origins. Generally speaking, the writer of this book gives us but brief indications of the fortunes of the patriarchs ; but in the case of this interview between Abraham and the Hethites he paints the scene in the liveliest colours. He describes the position of the cave of Machpelah more than once, and evidently attaches great importance to its purchase by Abraham. We must try to find out why he did so ; but, first of all, I may take this opportunity of making one or two remarks upon the customs of the Israelites in mourning for their dead, and the way in which they buried them.

When an Israelite lost any of his nearest relations he mourned for a certain number of days—never less than seven and sometimes as many as thirty. Most of this time he spent in the chamber in which the dead body lay, sitting there upon the ground, or among the ashes of the fireplace, which was in the middle of the room. Unwashed, unshaven, with dust upon his head and his face covered, he sat down, for the most part fasting, wrapped in a dark garment, usually called “a sack,” that had not been cut out or fitted. In former times the Israelites followed the custom, common among most uncivilised peoples in every age, of mutilating their bodies in token of grief ; and the practice of shaving a bald place “between the eyes” is especially mentioned. But this is forbidden in the law of Deuteronomy as heathenish.¹

We know but little of the treatment of the bodies of their dead by the Israelites of early times ; for though there are some traces of the custom of embalming the dead—which is known to have existed in Egypt and elsewhere—there are no clear proofs that the practice was generally followed by the Israelites. The corpse, whether more or less protected from decay, or simply wrapped in linen cloths, was carried on a

¹ Deuteronomy xiv. 1.

bier to the grave, while hired female mourners went before it with mournful music and cries of woe, and the relations of the deceased followed.

To lie unburied and be devoured by dogs and birds of prey was a frightful idea to the Israelites, for they all thought a great deal of having a regular funeral, and especially of being laid in the family grave. The practice of burning the dead is but seldom mentioned in Israelite literature, and seems only to have been followed in exceptional cases. As a rule they committed the bodily remains to the earth. They had a special preference for graves hewn out of a rock; and tombs of this description are still to be found in Palestine in great numbers.

The subject we are considering naturally turns our attention to Hebron, and makes us ask whether any remains of the grave of the patriarchs, of which our legend speaks, are still to be found there.

Tradition still points it out. Hebron is now called el-Khaliel, that is "(the city of) the friend (of God)," by which Abraham is meant, for the Arabians too hold him in high honour. The city lies in a deep, narrow valley, and the hills slope up from it on either side. On the south side of the city, at the foot of the eastern slope, the Haram, that is, the sanctuary, rises above every other building, and in the inmost portion of this sanctuary are the graves of the patriarchs. The Mussulmans, who are the present possessors of Palestine, as you know, allow the Jews to look through a little lattice in the wall, to the left of the principal entrance, into the vault in which the graves are said to be. Many of them avail themselves of this permission, and come to the holy place to weep and pray.

The date of these tombs is unknown, but they existed and were magnificently adorned as early as in the days of Josephus, that is in the first century after Christ. If Euro-

pean scholars could gain admittance to the interior of the sanctuary, with permission to investigate its oldest portions, they might get some light as to the age of the tombs and their immediate surroundings. But everyone who is not a Mussulman is strictly forbidden to enter the holy place. It appears, however, from the curious architecture of the most ancient portions of the walls and arches, that the building on the foundations and ruins of which the present modern sanctuary is reared, must have been built many ages ago.

It appears from our legend that even before the exile there was a place at Hebron that passed for the tomb of the patriarchs. At least the easiest explanation of the origin of such a story as the one in question is to suppose that there was some place to which the popular tradition had given this name. Who can say what was the cause of this? It may have grown out of some misunderstanding, or the zealots for the worship of Yahweh may have given the name to some cave in which heathen rites were practised, to give the affair an orthodox colour. All this, however, is mere guesswork as long as we know so little of the tombs themselves. All we can say is this, that most likely our writer was furnished with an opportunity for composing this story by some spot that passed for the tomb of the patriarchs.

But the most important point we have to inquire into is the great interest felt by the writer of the Book of Origins in this purchase of the cave of Machpelah. The importance he attached to it appears from his repeated mention of the cave in other passages as the place in which not only Abraham, but Isaac, Rebekah, Leah, and Jacob were buried. He is never tired of repeating that it was bought by Abraham for money.¹ The same writer also tells us that the piece of

¹ Genesis xxv. 9, 10, xlix. 32, l. 13.

land near Shechem, on which Jacob pitched his tent, was bought by that patriarch.¹ We can only think of one reason for his laying so much stress upon these purchases, namely, that he looked upon them more or less as establishing the right of the Israelites to conquer Canaan. If this is so, we have a remarkable example in these stories of the manner in which moral ideas gradually make their way.

The ancient sons of Israel, who conquered Canaan under Joshua's command, certainly troubled their heads very little with the question of what right they had to the country. They had only one right, namely, that of the strongest. Their god Yahweh had given them their land, just as Chemosh, the god of the Moabites, had given them theirs,² and just as all other peoples had received their possessions from their special gods. During the centuries that followed the conquest they were more puzzled to understand why there were so many Canaanites left in the country, and why they had not all been rooted out³ than why their own forefathers had been allowed to slaughter or expel so many thousands of them. When the belief in Yahweh's righteousness began to develop itself among the most advanced Israelites the sins of the Amorites and the other inhabitants of the country were brought forward as the reason for which Yahweh had given them into the hands of the Israelites.⁴ But it seems that the author of the Book of Origins felt how little right the immorality of the former possessors could give the Israelites to take their land from them; and that he tried to meet the difficulty in another way.

We have already had an example in a former story of progress in the knowledge of good and evil; for we saw how the oldest writer in Genesis, without feeling that he

¹ Genesis xxxiii. 19.

² Judges xi. 24.

³ Exodus xxiii. 29, 30; Deuteronomy vii. 16; Judges iii. 1, 2, 4.

⁴ See p. 157 (Genesis xv. 16); Deuteronomy ix. 4, &c.

was disgracing his hero, put a lie into the mouth of Abraham, namely, that Sarah was his sister; while a second writer tried to improve the work of his predecessor by glossing over this untruth.¹ We shall see again from other passages that this oldest writer had no clear notions of honesty or love of truth.

Now, this story from the Book of Origins does not point back to any other legend, but it refers to the fact of the conquest. The writer felt that Israel's claim to Canaan was not very well founded, and so tried to find some justification of the conquest of the land. This he found in the purchase of a family grave by Abraham and of a piece of land near Shechem by Jacob. So, according to him, the Israelites did but recover by force of arms what had been unjustly withheld from them. It is true that this was but weak ground upon which to rest their right to the whole of Canaan, but yet it is something that the writer felt the conquest of a country to deserve condemnation unless it could be justified in some way.

The right of the strongest is the oldest, the original right. For a long time there was none higher. Gradually, in the intercourse of individuals, it had to make way for a better right, and the prohibition, "Thou shalt not kill nor steal," came to be revered as a divine command. But long after this had been recognised the old right of the strongest remained in force in the dealings of nations with each other.

When one citizen took away anything from another by force or fraud it was called theft; and if anyone killed his neighbour he was a murderer. But when the Israelites fell upon their neighbours and robbed them of their land, simply because they wanted it themselves, they called their wars "the wars of Yahweh;" and all ancient peoples acted in the same way. The Jewish priest who wrote the Book of

¹ See pp. 143, 144.

Origins at any rate began to see that the right must be upheld in the dealings of nations as well as of individuals.

This fact is now recognised by all the more civilised nations. No people is justified in attacking its neighbours unless they have wronged, plundered, injured, or insulted it. A war of conquest is universally condemned. It may be asked whether such wars are not still waged, whether the right of the strongest is not still revered, as a matter of fact. Undoubtedly. But all this is no longer done avowedly. Even the most ambitious prince, however little he cares for the right, will find out some pretext for a war. Let us be thankful for this; for even the fact that evil disguises itself, and no longer dares shamelessly to display itself in its true shape, shows some progress at any rate. It is an involuntary tribute to the right.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FAITHFUL SLAVE.

GEN. XXIV.

A BRAHAM'S days were numbered. He saw that he was not long to outlive his wife, and that he would soon be gathered to his fathers. Now that he could see in Isaac the future ancestor of that posterity, to be called especially after himself, that was to inherit Canaan, he could go in peace. Yahweh had fulfilled his promise. But before he quietly laid down his head to die, he wanted to see his son happily married; for he had learned by his own experience that Yahweh was no more indifferent to the mother than to the father of the tribe, and that the holy people which should inherit the promise must not spring of an ignoble race on the mother's side. No Canaanite blood must flow in its veins.

And so, anxious to the last to labour for the accomplishment of God's promises, he called Eliezer, his chief servant, who had the superintendence of all his affairs and was therefore the appointed guardian of the young chief, and made him swear that he would seek a wife for Isaac from his former country, where his relatives, the tribe of Nahor, still dwelt. In no case must he marry him to a Canaanite wife, yet he must not allow him to return to Mesopotamia himself. The faithful slave was willing to do all that was possible for his master, but urged that perhaps the woman he chose might refuse to follow him. Abraham answered that in that case he would be free from his oath and the curse he had called down upon himself, should he break his promise, would not fall upon him. But the patriarch thought it very unlikely that his fears would be realised, for Yahweh, the god of heaven, who had brought him out of his fatherland and had promised Canaan to his posterity, would provide for this too. He would send his angel before Eliezer to enable him to find a wife for Isaac.

Thus persuaded, Eliezer took the oath required of him and set out on his journey, taking with him ten camels laden with treasure for the bride. He accomplished his journey prosperously and reached Haran, the city of Nahor, in "the land of the two rivers," safe and sound. Night was beginning to fall as he made his camels kneel down to rest at the well that lay close by the city.

So far all had gone well; but now how was he to find the right wife for Isaac? Was he to ask for the relatives of Abraham, and then demand the richest and most beautiful girl he could find amongst them in marriage for his master? Some such course would have been taken by human intelligence, by the wisdom of the world; but for the pious worshipper of Yahweh there was another way. His god, who had guided him so far, would himself point out to him

the wife he had chosen for Isaac. He would trust in him, and ask him for a sign. So he prayed, "O Yahweh, god of my master Abraham, be gracious to my master and grant that I may find her whom he desires! Let me appoint this sign with you. The girls of the city will soon be coming, as I stand by the well, to draw water, and if I ask one of them to give me some water to drink, and she says, 'yes, gladly! and I will draw some for your beasts of burden too'—then let her be the wife you have chosen for Isaac. This will be a proof of your kindness to me."

Yahweh heard the prayer, for the last words were still on Eliezer's lips when lo! the beautiful Rebekah, an unmarried girl, the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Abraham's brother Nahor and of Milcah, came out of the city with her pitcher on her shoulder. She went down to the well, filled her pitcher and came up the steps again. No sooner had she heard the request that the stranger made her, with a heart so full of hope, than she granted it to the full, resting her pitcher on her hand while he quenched his thirst. As soon as he was refreshed she saw the camels and said she would go and draw water for them too, till they had had enough; and suiting the action to the word she emptied her pitcher into the drinking trough, ran down to the well to replenish it, and so went on till the beasts had drunk their fill.

Eliezer followed every movement with his eyes, in speechless amazement and thankfulness. Had Yahweh really come to his aid so fully? Was she the chosen one? Though he had no longer any doubt that this was so, yet he must make assurance still more sure by finding out whether she was unmarried and of Abraham's kindred. Hoping to learn this, he addressed her again; "Tell me, maiden, who you are, and whether we can have a night's lodging in your father's house." Transported with delight he bowed himself

to the earth when she answered, "I am Bethuel's daughter. There is plenty of fodder and straw at home, and you are welcome to spend the night with us." The words of thanksgiving welled up in his heart: "Praised be Yahweh, who has directed my steps to the house of my master's brother!"

Then he gave Rebekah a heavy golden nose-ring and two bracelets, and she hastened home to tell them all that had happened. The sight of such handsome presents disposed them all, but especially Rebekah's brother Laban, very favourably towards the stranger. So Laban hurried to the well and found Eliezer with his subordinates and camels still waiting there. Then he said, "O favoured of Yahweh! come in with me. Why do you stay without? I have had my dwelling put in order for you, and there is stabling for the camels."

Of course Eliezer had no need of any long deliberation before accepting his hospitality. He was soon in Bethuel's house, the beasts were unloaded and fed, and water was brought in for a foot-bath for the guests. But when the master of the house would have them begin the evening meal Eliezer refused to taste anything before he had unburdened his heart. So he asked them to listen for a moment to what he had to say. When they had promised to do so he made himself known as Abraham's servant, and then enlarged upon the wealth of his master and told them how he had had a son in his old age who would inherit all he had. Then he told them of the oath that Abraham had made him take, and how Yahweh had not only led him prosperously to their home, but had pointed out to him, as clearly as could be, that no other than Rebekah was the destined wife of Isaac. This last circumstance was so conclusive that when Eliezer wound up by asking for an immediate answer to his request for Rebekah's hand, Laban and Bethuel exclaimed, as if with one mouth, "It is the finger

of Yahweh! We can urge nothing against it. You may take Rebekah to be the wife of your master's son, as Yahweh has commanded."

On receiving this reply the slave of Abraham fell down upon the earth to give Yahweh thanks. Then he opened all his treasures, rich bridal presents for Rebekah and many costly gifts for her mother and brother—such was the custom of the Israelites—as the price that must be paid for her. Then they took their evening meal.

Next morning Eliezer begged them to let him go home again at once, and even when Rebekah's relatives pressed him most earnestly to put off his return at least for ten days or so, he still insisted upon going back at once. As they could not come to any agreement in the matter, they asked the bride herself to decide between them, and she declared that she was ready to go at once.

Submitting to her decision, the members of Rebekah's family let her go, with her nurse, under the guidance of Eliezer and his men. As she was parting from them they all blessed her with the words, "O our sister! may your descendants be countless in number, and may they possess the cities of their enemies!"

Eliezer's return was as prosperous as his outward journey had been; and sooner than he could have hoped he was able to give Isaac his bride; for though he generally lived by the well Lahai-roi, Isaac had just now come northwards, and was in the neighbourhood of Hebron, the so-called "South of Judah." Still sorrowing over his mother's death, he had gone out in the twilight of a certain evening to lament her¹ undisturbed in the open field, when he saw the caravan approaching. He, too, was observed by the others, and Rebekah seemed to have some presentiment that he was her bridegroom, for as soon as she saw him she lighted

¹ After an amended version.

from her camel. "Who is that coming to meet us?" she asked Eliezer. "It is my master," he replied, and, in accordance with the customs of the land, Rebekah must veil herself at once.

Informed by Eliezer of all that had happened, Isaac took Rebekah into Sarah's tent. She became his wife, and he loved her, and in her love he found comfort for his mother's death.

By all that is told us here we are drawn towards Eliezer, the faithful slave of Abraham, born in his house,¹ the steward of all his possessions, fixed upon as his master's heir until the birth of Isaac. What thoughtfulness we trace in the difficulties he suggests! What tender care he showed in accomplishing the task he had undertaken! What true zeal inspired him, when, weary as he was with his journey, he refused to eat anything before he had delivered his message! What diligence he displayed in carrying out his mission! He is the very pattern of an old and faithful servant such as existed in the writer's mind, such as he had probably met in real life too, though hardly in such perfection. We are drawn towards Eliezer too by his earnest piety, none the less genuine because we must admit it to have been coupled with very mistaken ideas.

Yes! the whole idea of Eliezer, or rather of the writer of the story, as to the way in which God helps those he loves is mistaken and superstitious. Abraham expects that the wife whom Eliezer chooses will follow him, because Yahweh will send his angel to show him the way. Apparently Yahweh does so. Then he gives ear to Eliezer when he fixes upon a certain sign by which to know the chosen maid. She is pointed out by Yahweh himself, as her relations see at once.

The belief that such things may happen, and that God

¹ Genesis xv. 3.

sometimes uses outward means of warning men, of showing them their way, of helping or resisting them,—this belief was very common in ancient times. We shall meet with numbers of examples of it in the Bible, and it was long maintained by Christians too; nay, it is even now the faith of thousands. This idea has made people attend to omens, try to discover the meaning of unusual natural phenomena, and attempt to read the future by means of lots and other such contrivances. Thus it has not been unusual for Protestants, even in recent times, to use the Bible as a book from which they can ascertain what is going to happen to them, and which will expressly intimate to them what they are to do or leave undone. They opened a Bible, for instance, and took the first word they happened to see as a sign from God. So-called Bible-almanacs are often used in the same way by people who look at them when in any difficulty to learn from the text of the day what line of conduct to pursue.

Sensible people, however, no longer observe such practices as these; but there are still many remnants amongst us of the belief from which they rose. Thus, certain books of history lay great stress upon deliverances by the sudden rise of a storm, by the death of a dreaded enemy, or other unforeseen events; and they delight to point to them with some such exclamation as—"It was the hand of God!" Many a pious man can tell you of strange circumstances in his own life and in that of his friends, through which they escaped some danger or gained some great happiness in a way of which they had never thought, and which they refer, therefore, to an immediate dispensation of providence. Irreligious people say nothing about "the hand of God," but so-called coincidences and accidental combinations sometimes make them betray a certain remnant of the old belief, that some mysterious power has a hand in their fate, by exclamations such as—"But really it is very remarkable!"

This belief is connected with a very defective idea of God's relation to the world, and with a misunderstanding of the natural connection of events and phenomena. It is a mistake to suppose that God gives us any special revelation of his will in these unexpected occurrences. God has given us no mysterious signs, no lots or other such contrivances, to teach us our way through the world. Our reason is the guide he has given us, and he reveals himself in the fact of our learning to use it, and to avoid dangers and promote our happiness by its help, far more than in one or two accidents that turn out in our favour.

In ancient times, however, people did not think so ; and we shall see that the most pious Israelites kept "asking the mouth of Yahweh," that is, trying to penetrate the future by some means or other—by lots, for example, or by the aid of the priests or the prophets, or by dreams. Like all other superstitious ideas, this belief, that God informs us what is about to happen in such ways as these, is very hostile to progress and injurious to our character. For it fills us with dread of a mysterious world that surrounds us, and takes away the clearness of head and freshness of heart that enable us to find our way through life.

Though we cannot but think, then, that the ideas of Abraham's servant about his god and the way in which he helped him were untrue, yet we cannot help looking on him with great affection. In his case, as in that of many other men, especially of ancient times, we must learn to value what is good even when accompanied by much that is imperfect, and especially by superstitious ideas. We must never become attached to the mistakes, but still less must we withhold our admiration from those who make them, if the keynote of their character be true. Eliezer's faith may have been marred by mistaken notions, but at least it was coupled with self-sacrifice and fidelity. His piety is of the true

stamp, for it inspires him with zeal and makes him forget himself while he watches over his master's interests. He is the type of what a certain Christian of the first century¹ had in mind when he said in exhortation to the slaves of his own time: "Servants! be obedient to your earthly masters in everything; not with eyeservice as menpleasers; but in simplicity of soul, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do it from your heart, as for the Lord, and not for men; knowing that you will receive from the Lord the reward of the inheritance."

CHAPTER XXI.

ISAAC.

GEN. XXVI.

THE accounts of Isaac are very scanty. The Book of Origins passes over him almost in silence, simply mentioning that he was born, that at the age of forty he married Rebekah, that he and his brother Ishmael buried their father Abraham, who died at the age of a hundred and seventy-five, in the cave of Machpelah,² that he had two sons, that he lived by the well of Lahai-roi, and that he died there. One of the older writers is certainly rather fuller, but the tameness of all he tells us under this head contrasts remarkably with his detailed accounts of Abraham and Jacob, and convinces us that he dwelt with no particular interest on the fortunes of Isaac.

The name of Isaac, however, is repeatedly explained. It may be translated by "laugher," and this meaning of the word is referred to in several stories. When God foretold the birth of a son to Abraham the patriarch "laughed," upon which, in allusion to this expression of unbelief, God

¹ Colossians iii. 22—24.² Genesis xxv. 7—10.

commanded him to call his son Isaac.¹ When Yahweh, reclining with his angels before Abraham's tent, foretold that Sarah should give birth to a son she laughed,² and when the promise had been fulfilled, she cried, "God will make them all 'laugh' at such an old mother!"³ Besides these there are two other references to the name of Isaac; for Ishmael is expelled, together with his mother, because he had "laughed";⁴ as if no one but Isaac had a right to do so! and King Abimelech discovers from the way in which Isaac "laughs" with Rebekah that she is not his sister but his wife.⁵

Except the account of the danger he ran of being sacrificed by his father, and that of the manner in which he obtained a wife, in both of which he took a very passive share, together with the stories of Esau and Jacob in which he sinks into the back-ground, while his sons take the chief parts, there is but one legend of any extent about Isaac. It runs as follows:—

Once there was a famine in the land, so that Isaac was obliged to leave it. On his way to Egypt, to which he intended to go, he came to the land of Abimelech, king of the Philistines, at Gerar. Here Yahweh appeared to him, forbade him to continue his journey, and commanded him to remain in this country, promising that he would bless him there. Mindful of the promise he once had made, upon oath, to Abraham,⁶ he would give the land for an inheritance to his posterity, because his father had been obedient to the law of his god.

In obedience to this command, Isaac remained at Gerar. In fear of his life he imitated the conduct of Abraham in Egypt and declared his wife to be his sister, but as soon as the king had discovered this deception, Isaac saw how unneces-

¹ Genesis xvii. 17—19.

² Genesis xviii. 12—15.

³ Genesis xxi. 6.

⁴ Genesis xxi. 9.

⁵ Genesis xxvi. 8.

⁶ Genesis xv.

sary his precaution had been, for the king forbid his subjects upon pain of death to injure either him or his wife in any way.

An unusually rich harvest, gathered in by Isaac, gave him another proof of the favour of his god, and his wealth continually increased. At last the number of his flocks and his dependants became so great as to excite the envy of the Philistines. They tried to thwart him, therefore, by filling up the wells that Abraham's men had dug in their country, and finally Abimelech himself insisted on Isaac's leaving his territory, as he had become too powerful for him.

The patriarch yielded to his wishes, and pitched his tents in "the valley of Gerar," where his men re-opened the former wells of Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up, and gave them their old names again. But when they discovered certain new wells the Philistines, on two occasions, disputed the possession of them. So they called the wells Esek and Sitnah ("violence" and "hate"). They remained in undisturbed possession of a third well, however, and therefore called it Rehoboth, that is "room," because Yahweh had made room for them.

But Isaac left this district too, and chose Beersheba as his home. It seemed to be a holy place, for Yahweh appeared to him there, making himself known as the god of Abraham, and promising to protect him for his father's sake. So Isaac built an altar there in honour of Yahweh. There, too, his dependants once sank a well, and just at this time Abimelech came to visit him, with Ahuzzath, "his friend," that is to say his first minister of state, and Phichol his general. Isaac asked, in some surprise, "What brings you here,—you who drove us out of your country because you hated us?" Upon which Abimelech replied, "We have seen that Yahweh helps you, and are, therefore, desirous of making some agreement with you. Remember, now, that

we never injured you, but allowed you to depart in peace ; swear, then, that neither will you devise any evil against us, for you are blessed of Yahweh." Isaac, who was of a peace-loving disposition, granted their request, and prepared a banquet for them. On the following day they confirmed their alliance with an oath, after which Abimelech and his followers departed in peace. That same day Isaac's men told him of the well they had found, to which accordingly he gave the name of "Sheba," that is *oath*. So the city that lies close by it is still called Beersheba, or "the well of the oath."

Not without reason has this story been called an echo of the legends of Abraham, for almost every point in the former stories reappears in this. The measure adopted by Isaac at Gerar to escape the danger into which Rebekah's beauty might bring him is twice ascribed to Abraham.¹ And not only is this latter patriarch brought into connection with Abimelech on one of these occasions, but a scene takes place between them² almost exactly like the one just described. For Abraham, we are told, when dwelling at Beersheba, received a visit once from Abimelech and his general Phichol. The prince desired to make a treaty with him, for he was convinced of God's love towards the patriarch. Abraham consented, but rebuked Abimelech because his dependants had robbed him of a well that was his own, upon which the Philistine excused himself by pleading his ignorance of what had occurred. After this they concluded a treaty. On this occasion Abraham set apart seven lambs, and when Abimelech asked him why he did so, he said that they were intended for a pledge, by the receipt of which the King of Gerar was to declare that he recognised the well as Abraham's property. So the well was called Beersheba, that is

¹ Genesis xii. and xx.

² Genesis xxi. 22—34.

"the well of seven," because the oaths had been taken by it, and in Hebrew the word that means "oath" is derived from the sacred number "seven." When Abimelech was gone Abraham planted a tamarisk at Beersheba and worshipped Yahweh there.

We see at a glance that this story agrees, not only in its main features, but even in details, such as the proper names, with the one given above, in which Isaac is the agent. Indeed this latter story appears to be expressly intended to throw Isaac altogether into the shadow of his father; for all the wells he finds had been already sunk by Abraham, though afterwards stopped up; and even when Yahweh promises to bless him it is always expressly added that he does so for Abraham's sake.

If the accounts of the patriarchs were supposed to be historical, then the scantiness of the information given us about Isaac would require no explanation, for we should only have to say that nothing more had been preserved by tradition, though even then it would be curious that nothing should be said of him that had not been told of Abraham before. But if these accounts are legendary, we ask with greater curiosity, "How is it that the writers take so much more pleasure in telling us of Abraham and Jacob than of Isaac, and that the latter has become such a colourless figure, and, in fact, a mere name?" Though this question cannot be answered with certainty, yet we are not quite in the dark about it.

Remember what has been said already¹ about the origin of the stories of the patriarchs, especially that each of them seems to have belonged to a different district—Jacob to have been the patriarch of the northern tribes, and Abraham that of Judah; and then look for a moment at Isaac's country.

It is evident what country this is. The saga represents

¹ Pp. 133–135.

him as always living at Beersheba or the neighbourhood, at Gerar, or at Lahai-roi, and since it is the exception for him to appear at Hebron,¹ it is probably a simple mistake by which he is represented in one passage² as having generally lived there. Let us see what is known of Beersheba.

The city "of the Seven-well" on the southern border of the land of the Israelites was an important place, for it was the first resting stage for travellers from Egypt who had crossed the desert and were on their way to Jerusalem by Hebron. When the Israelites had gained possession of this city, they naturally came into frequent contact with strangers there; for to the west of Beersheba lay the land of the Philistines, while to the south and east of its territory lived the Edomites. A sanctuary and a sacred tree stood there. It is not known with certainty under what name the deity was worshipped there; but it is remarkable that in a certain legend, of which we shall speak hereafter, mention is twice made of "the Dread" or "the Terror" of Isaac;³ and this name agrees very well with the character of all the old Israelite gods, for they were looked upon as stern powers that inspired fear.⁴ Isaac is called the ancestor both of Israel and of Edom, and the temple of the Terror of Beersheba was, doubtless, the common sanctuary of the members of these closely-related tribes. There they made their vows before beginning the journey through the wilderness, or brought their thank offerings when they had accomplished it successfully. There, too, they laid aside their quarrels with the Philistines about wells and pastures, and made their treaties with them.

The Israelites who settled in Beersheba and the neighbourhood belonged to the tribe of Simeon,⁵ but the district was afterwards considered part of Judah, and the Simeonites altogether disappeared. The misfortunes suffered by

¹ Genesis xxiv. 62.

² Genesis xxxv. 27.

³ Genesis xxxi. 42, 53.

⁴ See pp. 19, 20, 159.

⁵ 1 Chronicles iv. 28; Joshua xix. 2.

this tribe and the causes of its disappearance are unknown, and we must, therefore, be content with the remark that the inhabitants of this region, the worshippers in the sanctuary at Beersheba, who called themselves the sons of Isaac, lost all their influence and power. The natural consequence was that their worship lost in importance, and that Isaac, although admitted into the series of the patriarchs, took a secondary rank and was so completely overshadowed by Abram, the patriarch of the mighty tribe of Judah, that the saga transferred to him all that had originally been connected with the name of Isaac. The expressions "house of Isaac" in place of "house of Jacob" or "house of Israel," and "high places of Isaac" by the side of "sanctuaries of Israel," do still occur,¹ however, and that too in the mouth of Amos—the one prophet who mentions the worship at Beersheba.² This prophet lived in the time of Jeroboam II., and we need not be surprised to find him, rather than another, using this name and betraying some knowledge of this ancient worship, for he came from Tekoa, which lies north of Hebron, in that same "South" of which Beersheba was the furthest limit. He must therefore have lived in the midst of these "sons of Isaac." Josiah's reformation probably gave the last blow to the worship at Beersheba, or if it survived this storm, it fell more and more into decay after the fall of Judah, until at last it disappeared.

While, for these reasons, Isaac, as preserved in the tradition, is but a lifeless figure, the pictures of his sons, Esau and Jacob, on the other hand, are sketched in very vivid colours, which give them a look of real individuality, and make them far more interesting than their father.

¹ Amos vii. 16, 9.

² Amos v. 5; viii. 14.

CHAPTER XXII.

JACOB OBTAINS THE BIRTHRIGHT AND HIS FATHER'S BLESSING.

GENESIS XXV. 19—34, XXVII. 1—45.

BETWEEN the southern end of the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Ælana lies a broad, sandy valley, called the valley of Arabah, along the east side of which stretches a steep range of hills. This is the range of Seir. Its highest peak, Mount Hor, rears itself to nearly five thousand feet above the level of the Mediterranean Sea. On the east these mountains touch the plains of Arabia Deserta. The name Seir may mean "rough," "bristling," and it is usually supposed, therefore, to indicate a mountainous and well-wooded district. Between the masses of rock, of which the mountains are largely composed, lie a number of fruitful valleys, with green pastures and rich plough land, and many spots well suited for the cultivation of the vine; but, on the whole, the country is bare, and the western hills especially are said to be very barren and unfruitful. The air is pure, however, and the heat is tempered by cool winds, so that the climate is very healthy.

This mountainous district was inhabited in early times by the Horites, concerning whom we know little but the names of certain of their tribal chiefs.¹ The name "Horite" is often translated "cave-dweller," and though the correctness of this translation is open to doubt, yet the character of the country certainly led its inhabitants to choose dwelling places which would have made the designation quite appropriate; for the district was full of caves, and not only the tombs, but many dwellings for the living, and even public buildings, were hewn out of the rocks.

¹ Genesis xxxvi. 20—30.

Now these Horites had been conquered by a branch of the Terachites ; and even before the time of Moses, accordingly, the mountains of Seir were in the hands of the Edomites, whom the old Israelite stories represent as a mingled race of Terachites, Horites, Canaanites, and Ishmaelites ; for this is the meaning of the assertion that Esau, who is expressly called the ancestor of the Edomites,¹ was the son of Isaac, and was married to Adah, a Hethite, that is a Canaanite,² to Aholibamah, a Horite³ (who is elsewhere⁴ also called a Canaanite), and to Bashemath, an Ishmaelite.⁵

Long before the Israelites had obtained fixed abodes the social life of the Edomite tribes was settled and regular, and consequently while "the sons of Israel" were still divided amongst themselves, and were a prey to the surrounding nations because they had not yet succeeded in rising to any national unity, the inhabitants of Seir, so closely related to them, were already governed by kings.⁶ In the language of the legend this is expressed by saying that Esau was older than his twin brother Jacob.

But this was a mystery to the Israelite, for the elder was also the chief. The eldest son succeeded to the rights of his father, and became his heir and successor. The eldest son was chief of his brothers. Was Edom then Israel's superior ? Impossible ! Jacob, although the younger brother, had obtained the rights of the firstborn.

Now, until the time of Saul, the relations between the Edomites and the Israelites were very friendly, and the recollection of their brotherly connection with each other was kept up long afterwards. But as soon as the national unity of Israel was established, the Edomites seem to have grown jealous of the sister nation. At any rate there was

¹ Genesis xxxvi. 1, 8, 9, 19, 43.

² Genesis xxxvi. 20—25.

³ Genesis xxxvi. 3, xxviii. 9.

² Genesis xxxvi. 2, xxvi. 34.

⁴ Genesis xxvi. 34.

⁶ Genesis xxxvi. 31—43.

war between the two kingdoms from the time of Saul onward. David conquered the Edomites, and after his death they still remained subject to the kings of Judah, until the days of Ahaz, but not without making repeated efforts to recover their freedom.

The higher antiquity of the people of Edom and the higher privileges of that of Israel, the greater fruitfulness of Canaan, as compared with the mountains of Seir, the subjection of the Edomites, and the reluctance with which they bore the yoke of their brothers—all this is referred to in the following legend:—

When Isaac and Rebekah had been married twenty years, their hearts were gladdened by the birth of their twin sons Esau and Jacob, the only children they ever had. The elder, Esau, received this name, which means “the hairy,” because his skin was so extraordinarily shaggy that he looked as if he were all wrapped up in a garment of hair. His character agreed very well with his appearance, for when he grew up he delighted in the wild hunter’s life or in wandering through the country far and near. But Jacob, whose name means “the deceiver,” was a respectable kind of man, and lived in his tent like a shepherd. Isaac was more attached to Esau, for he was very fond of venison, but Jacob was Rebekah’s favourite.

One day when Esau came home hungry from the chase, he found Jacob busy with preparations for a meal. Some red-looking lentil porridge that was just ready excited the famished hunter’s longing; so he asked for it, somewhat impatiently, and said, “Give me some of that red stuff to drink, for I’m tired!” Seeing that his brother was terribly hungry, Jacob seized the opportunity to demand, as the price of the meal, that Esau should give up his rights as the first-born son to him. His rough brother, longing for

the food, said in reply, " I may be dead to-morrow ! Why should I trouble myself about my birthright ? " But Jacob would not be put off with a careless word like this, and insisted on Esau's solemnly renouncing all his rights as the eldest son upon his oath, which accordingly he did. Then Jacob gave him some bread and the lentil porridge, and he ate and drank and went on his way without a care or a thought !

So lightly did Esau value his right as the first-born son, that he sold it in this way to Jacob ! From his exclamation, " That red stuff, that red stuff there ! " he got the name of *Edom*, that is " the red."

By this stroke Jacob had secured the birthright for himself ; but he was to get the better of his elder brother in yet another way. For one day, when Isaac had grown old and blind, he called Esau and said to him, " I am old, my son, and know not when I may die ; but before I go I would fain give you a father's blessing. So take your bow and arrows and go out into the fields and shoot some game, and when I have eaten it I will bless you in the presence of Yahweh." So Esau went out with a light heart to hunt.

But Rebekah had overheard the conversation, and it disturbed her greatly. For if Isaac did as he intended, there was no longer any chance that her darling Jacob would receive the best portion of the inheritance. She knew what to do, however. She called Jacob without loss of time, and told him to bring a couple of kids and prepare them to set before his father for venison, so that he might receive the blessing himself as if he were Esau. Jacob objected that, since Esau was rough and hairy, and he himself was smooth, he was afraid of being found out by his father, in which case he should stand before him in confusion, and receive a curse instead of

a blessing. But his mother removed this scruple by saying, "May the curse fall upon me, my son! Only do as I tell you." So Jacob allowed himself to be persuaded.

The meal was soon ready. Jacob had put on Esau's clothes, and had covered his hands and neck with goat skin, so that if his father were to feel him, in doubt whether he really had the right man before him, he might not notice the difference between Jacob's smoothness and the roughness of Esau. Thus prepared, he went into his father's tent.

"My father!" "Here am I, my son! who are you?" "I am Esau, your eldest son; I have done as you desired; come, eat of my venison and then bless me." "How soon you have got it ready, my son!" "Yahweh, your god, brought the quarry across my path," was the traitor's answer. "Come near," said the blind man, suspiciously, "and let me feel you, to be sure that you really are Esau." The precautions of Rebekah appeared successful, and Isaac, after passing his fingers over the rough hands of his son as he stood before him, was half convinced, and murmured, "It is Jacob's voice, but the hands are Esau's." Yet once more, however, he inquired, "It is really my son Esau, then?" and when he had been assured again that it was, he suppressed all his doubts, and allowed the meal to be set before him. When he had eaten the meat and drunk the wine he made ready for his solemn task. "Kiss me, my son!" said the blind old man, and as Jacob kissed him, and he perceived the smell of his clothes—the smell of the hunter's garments—all his doubts and hesitation disappeared, and he broke out in passionate fervour, "My son is fragrant as the field that Yahweh has blessed!" And now the old man's hands are raised, and laid upon the head of his kneeling son. "God," he cries,

“ God shall give thee of the dew of heaven,
And of the fatness of earth,
And abundance of corn and wine !
Peoples shall be thy servants,
Nations shall bow before thee !
Be thou thy brothers’ ruler,
Let thy mother’s sons fall down before thee !
He who curses thee shall be cursed,
He who blesses thee blessed.”

Of course Jacob made away with all possible speed, and left Isaac deep in thought. It was some time before the latter was roused from his reflections by a voice that had always been dear to him, but filled him with terror now. “ My father ! ” cried Esau, as he entered the tent full of bright anticipations, “ rise up and eat of your son’s venison, that you may bless me.” “ Who are you ? ” the old man asked. “ Your son, your eldest son, Esau ! ” was the reply ; and Isaac, betrayed and horror-struck, grieving for Esau’s sake and knowing that his blessing could not be called back, exclaimed, “ Who was it then, that was here but now, that brought venison from his hunting, of which I ate before you came ? I have blessed him, moreover, and he shall be blessed indeed ! ” A loud and bitter cry escaped the defrauded Esau—“ Bless me, me too, my father.” “ Alas ! your brother has come and has stolen away your blessing, my son ! ” In scorn and indignation, Esau burst out, “ Truly he is well named Jacob ‘ the deceiver,’ for this is the second time he has deceived me, first he took my birthright from me, and now he has stolen my blessing ! ” and then with more of sadness in his voice he went on, “ Father ! have you no blessing left for me ? ” His father, who would so gladly have given him something, but was bound by his own words, answered mournfully, “ I have made him your master, and all his brothers have I made his

servants, corn and wine have I given him, and what have I left, then, to give you, my son?" Esau burst into tears and could only say, "Have you but this one blessing, father? Oh father! bless me too!"

As the rude hunter sinks sobbing to the ground, his father lays his hand upon his head. He longs from the bottom of his heart to bless him, but he has no power to turn fate aside, and the words that rise involuntarily to his lips sound more like a curse than a blessing:—

"Bereft¹ of the fatness of earth shall thy home be,
Bereft of the dew of heaven.
A freebooter's life shalt thou lead,
And be subject unto thy brother;
But in restless freedom thou shalt break his yoke
And shake it from off thy neck."

No wonder that Esau hated his brother for what he had done. He plotted vengeance; but, as he loved his father, he determined to wait until after his death and then to destroy his brother. But when Rebekah heard that Esau had declared that this was his intention she called Jacob and said to him: "See, your brother comforts himself for the injury you have done him, by the hope that he may kill you. Fly therefore to my brother Laban, in Haran, and stay there till Esau's wrath has cooled and he has forgotten the whole affair. Why should I lose both my sons at once?"

Before retelling the story we glanced at its object, and at the way in which the nature of the countries inhabited by the Israelites and the Edomites and the history and mutual relations of the two peoples are as it were reflected in it; and we need, therefore, spend no more time in

¹ After an amended version.

specially pointing out these matters. There are, however, several points in the story which still call for our attention.

The legend places us in a world full of amazing superstition. Esau, the writer assumes, since he was the eldest, would have been the chief as well, had not Jacob seized his opportunity and succeeded in buying the right of the first-born from him, and so stepping into his privileges. This does not mean that Esau was constantly injuring himself by the carelessness of which he gave proof on this occasion, and that Jacob got on in the world as a natural consequence of the shrewdness of which this was a specimen; nor does it mean that, in consequence of having sold his birthright, Esau was obliged to give up certain privileges, the exercise of which made him Jacob's superior. No, the story means to say that Jacob came into possession of the power and consideration that Yahweh had destined for Isaac's first-born son.

The same remark holds good of his stealing his father's blessing. Unenlightened people still think very seriously of the blessing or curse of others. They are delighted by a hearty good wish, and, still more, appalled by a bitter curse, not because the blessing or curse shows their neighbours to be well or ill disposed towards them, and it is pleasanter to receive signs of friendship than proofs of enmity, but because they believe that these blessings and curses exercise some influence upon their lot, and that their prosperity and adversity are, to some extent, dependent upon them. In ancient times this was a general belief.

But of course people did not attach the same weight to every man's words. They declared the favourable or unfavourable predictions of certain individuals to be especially rich in happy or disastrous results. Who these specially powerful individuals were, was a question variously answered according to the various mental attitudes from which it was asked. Those who attached most importance to religion

believed the most pious men to have the greatest influence ; but others were especially anxious about the words of those whom they considered cleverer than others. It often happened that the boldness with which certain people declared themselves to have power over the forces of nature and the lot of their fellow men, made such an impression on the ignorant multitude that they bowed down before them in terror. Moreover any circumstance that threw any sort of mystery over a man was enough to make people think that he had power over the lot of his fellow men. This belief then in soothsayers, magicians, witches, rain-doctors, and enchanters, which was once very general and has by no means disappeared even now, rises from a want of reflection, from ignorance, and most of all from fear, which is always powerful amongst those whose intellectual life is poorly developed.

It is not surprising that people who held such beliefs thought a great deal of the blessing or the curse of a father. Who would not shudder involuntarily, however innocent he might be, if his father cursed him ? In such a case, though the intellect repeated after the Israelite sage, "As a sparrow flies away, as a swallow disappears, so a curse for which there is no cause shall not come,"¹ yet no one would be able to get rid of a very bitter recollection of it, and many a one would be in danger, when some misfortune happened to him, of thinking of this curse as if the two things had some connection with each other. And yet we know very well that such a connection does not really exist, and that no man's words have power to fix our weal or woe. How very differently the ancient Israelites thought upon these matters and how far most of them were from sharing the common sense of the proverb just quoted we may see from the story of Isaac's blessing.

¹ Proverbs xxvi. 2.

Isaac wishes, before he dies, to bless Esau and to make him lord over all his brothers. If he fulfils this intention Esau will really receive these blessings. So Isaac himself and Esau and Rebekah and Jacob all believe. The last of these disguises himself and receives his father's blessing in his brother's stead; he obtains the promise of a fruitful country and of the rulership. Esau is in despair when he finds out what has happened, and Isaac too is downcast, for his words have decided the future of his sons. He perfectly understands that Jacob came "with deceit" and stole the blessing, but in spite of this the blessing itself does not lose its power. "And now he will be blessed," he declares emphatically. Now it is all very well to try to soften down this most extraordinary and indeed shocking representation by saying that Isaac's mistake was brought about by Yahweh because he desired to make Jacob the superior, and that Isaac, therefore, though he did not know it himself, blessed his sons "through faith";¹ but nothing is gained by this way of putting it, for it simply brings more clearly to light the amazing imperfections in the conception formed by this writer of his god. For if Yahweh desired to make Jacob chief of the brothers, could he not have done so in spite of Esau's being the elder and of Isaac's having blessed him? Must Jacob deceive his brother twice in order that his god might be able to bless him? Had the words of a man such a powerful influence over Yahweh?

We observed just now that this superstitious set of ideas springs from a low stage of intellectual developement; and it may perhaps be affirmed that the story tells quite as much against the writer's morality. For when he represents Jacob as being blessed by Yahweh by means of the birthright he had bought from his brother in an unguarded moment, and the blessing he had stolen from him, we might very well

¹ Hebrews xi. 20.

suppose that he saw absolutely nothing wrong in these proceedings. But this would be doing him an injustice. Appearances in this case are misleading.

Let us examine the characters of the two men here portrayed!

We are most attracted by Esau. Not that even he is a very noble figure! The levity with which, to still his hunger, he sells his rights as the first-born son, with the exclamation, "Who knows how soon I may die!" is a striking type of the lightness with which many a one sacrifices peace of conscience and health of soul to some momentary pleasure or passing enjoyment¹, and is as much to be condemned as his violent burst of passion against Jacob. But this levity is accompanied by a certain freshness and naturalness. He loves his father, and, for his sake, puts off his vengeance. There is something impressive in his passionate grief when the blessing is stolen from him; for it speaks of something more than mere disappointment at the loss of wealth and honour. Esau is rough, but straightforward; a man of the field, and, though not our ideal, yet more attractive than Jacob, the smooth, cautious, crafty man, who seizes his opportunity of getting hold of the birthright, has but one objection when his mother urges him to deceive his blind old father, namely, that perhaps he may be found out and cursed, and unhesitatingly follows his mother's advice as soon as she declares her readiness to take the curse upon herself! The word used by the writer to describe the character of Jacob² is peculiar. I have translated it "respectable." Most of the translations, both ancient and modern, render it "simple," "upright." The word that is used in the original properly means "perfect," "sound," and the writer's meaning in using this word of Jacob is explained by the connection. Esau is called a man of the field,

¹ Hebrews xii. 16, 17.

² Genesis xxv. 27.

rough, quick, and changeable, but Jacob is a "perfect" man, dwelling in tents. Gentle manners, courtesy in the intercourse of life and culture distinguished the dwellers in tents from the rough, wandering hunters. These are the qualities, then, celebrated in Jacob.

We must not suppose, however, that because the writer placed the respectable Jacob above the ruder Esau he therefore approved of the conduct of the former to his brother and his father. It is only among some few tribes of savages that such ignorance of what is right can be found as to make them think there is nothing wrong in cheating their nearest relatives, and the writer sees well enough that Jacob's conduct can be described by no gentler term than that of cheating; he himself calls it so without reserve.¹ His mistake is in calling ill-gotten goods a blessing of God, and so making his Yahweh a party to Jacob's knaveries; not in having approved of the deception, which he never did.

In the main, then, we agree with the writer in our judgment of this dextrous double dealing on the part of Israel's ancestor. But we go further than he does, and should call a man like Jacob anything but "perfect." Cultivation may be worth something, and pleasant manners in society may be preferable to a rough way of speaking and acting, for roughness often causes mischief and is a source of strife. But if an ugly mind lurks behind the urbane exterior, if the pleasing manners throw a veil over scheming treachery, then all the outward cultivation is as nothing. Nay, sometimes it is even worse than nothing, for we are attracted by it in spite of ourselves, and so the deceiver has free play. A rough, straightforward man is at any rate better than a "smooth" individual.

² Genesis xxvii. 35, 36.

CHAPTER XXIII.

JACOB'S DREAM.

GEN. XXVIII. 10—22.

FEW forms of worship were so universal in ancient times as the homage paid to sacred stones. Amongst uncivilized tribes, or so-called savages, it is to be found almost everywhere to the present day; and among the most various nations, which have long ago struggled out of the state of barbarism, sundry reminiscences of the worship of stones are still preserved. The savage looks upon certain unhewn stones as deities, and worships them accordingly. It is very difficult to make out what his ideas in doing this are, and so too with respect to many other elements of his worship it is very hard to understand what goes on in his mind, just because there is not much that does go on there. He reflects but little or not at all. Involuntarily we look for too much depth in him.

The lowest stage of religion that we can discover is generally called *fetishism*, sometimes *animism*. Its characteristic is the worship of all manner of miscellaneous objects that happen to make an impression on its votaries. Among the collections of these sacred things are found the strangest objects, products both of nature and of art, side by side. The name *fetishism* is not really at all appropriate to this form of worship, since it owes its origin to a mistake. For when the Portuguese voyagers came to certain regions to which but little civilization or knowledge had penetrated, and to which no Europeans had ever found their way before (such as the countries of the Negroes in Africa for instance), they saw the natives worshipping certain objects, and supposed that they were instruments of magic. So they called this form of religion after their word *fetisso*

which means a *charm*. The name *animism*, derived from the Latin word *anima*, "soul," implies that the savages think of their sacred objects as living and having souls. We shall use the word *fetishism* as the one most generally employed.

Now among sacred objects of this kind, unhewn stones occupy a prominent place; and in the history of the religion of even the most highly civilized peoples, such as the Greeks, Romans, Hindoos, Arabs, and Germans, we find traces of the attachment felt by the masses to their stone-gods, an attachment often so deep that in many cases the reformers who desired to supersede these rude forms of worship by better ones, saw no chance of getting rid of the sacred stones. They tried therefore to find some explanation of the homage paid to them. Among the Romans they made them into boundary stones, raised in honour of Terminus, the god of boundaries. In other places they explained the homage paid them by declaring that they were meteor-stones that had fallen from the sky. In other districts they were made into monuments or altars of the forefathers. When the simple faith in the consecrated stones began to languish, the learned men of the Greeks and Romans, among others, gave all manner of profound interpretations of their sanctity, and taught that these stones were the dwellings of the gods, or petrified sunbeams. But this throws no light upon the real significance they had to the minds of their ancient worshippers. Perhaps the gigantic dimensions and grotesque forms of certain masses of rock gave them the impression of strength and of something mysterious. Then some concurrence of events might lead them to believe that a certain stone had exercised a beneficial or injurious influence upon their fate; and imagination, unrestrained by habits of reflection, had thus free play. The belief that all objects were alive, contributed its share towards increasing the reverential awe for anything that had once attracted the attention, and finally the fame

of the sanctity of certain stones was preserved and magnified by tradition. However this may be, the worship of stones reappears in all manner of countries. They were honoured by sacrifices and were anointed with blood, wine, or oil in sign of reverence.

One of the most celebrated of all sacred stones is the Black Stone, in the Caaba, at Mecca, formerly the common sanctuary of the Arab tribes, and afterwards down to the present day, the temple of Islam. When Mohammed rose, this stone was considered the most sacred thing in the temple ; and though the worship offered to it was as little in keeping with his religion as the homage paid to the other idols, yet he did not venture to attack it, and when he had conquered Mecca, though he banished all the other idols from the Caaba, he reverentially kissed this stone. In later times the learned Arabs invented all kinds of wonderful stories about it ; such as that it had become so black because of the sins of men ; and that the angel Gabriel had brought it to Abraham when he was building the Caaba, and so on. The stone still continued to be the most sacred object of Islam, so that in the year 930 A.D., when an hostile tribe wanted to break the neck of this religion, they could think of nothing better than to steal the Black Stone. This plan accordingly was violently carried out, amid the lamentations of the inhabitants of Mecca. But it was no good after all, for now the faithful worshipped the place in the wall where the stone had been imbedded ! At last it was bought back again for an enormous sum of money.

Among the ancient Israelites, too, the worship of stones was very general. The reformers among them, prophets and priests of Yahweh, certainly did their best to wipe out the remembrance of the fact, but they were not altogether successful in doing so. In Euhemeristic fashion,¹ they at-

¹ See pp. 134—137.

tempted to make the stones which were honoured by the people harmless, by finding a place for them in the Yahweh-worship; and many narratives owe their origin to this attempt; but in these stories the original signification of the sacred objects shines through everywhere.

The old stone worship has also left traces behind it in some of the Israelitish proper names; as Elitsur, *i.e.*, "the rock is my god;" Tsurishaddai, "Shaddai, or 'the mighty one,' is my rock;" Tsuriel, "God is my rock;" Pedatsur, "the rock delivers." Yahweh too is frequently called the rock of his worshippers, or the rock of Israel. Now, it is quite true that this is metaphorical; just as Yahweh is often called the mountain, the shield or the fortress of those that trust in him; but the marked preference shown for the expression "Israel's rock," and the emphasis with which it is used, show that there must have been a special reason for selecting just this metaphor so often; and we can find no other than that derived from the ancient worship of blocks of stone. Here is one out of many examples:¹

The Rock, his work is pure,
For all his ways are right.

The Rock that produced thee thou hast rejected,
And thou hast forgotten the god that bore thee.

How should one (Israelite) pursue a thousand,
And two put ten thousand to flight,
Except their (the enemies') Rock had sold them,
And Yahweh delivered them up!
For their Rock is not as our Rock.

In these lines "the Rock" is used in exactly the same sense as the word, *god*. The name generally used to signify the sacred stones, which were found in great numbers by most altars and also standing alone, was *massebah*, a word the literal meaning of which is simply "something which is

¹ Deuteronomy xxxii. 4, 18, 30, 31.

set up." In the Authorised Version it is translated "an image."¹ The Romans called them "anointed stones" on account of the manner in which they were usually worshipped.

Now Bethel was one of the places at which there was a sacred stone. This city, the name of which signifies "God's house," was, as is well-known, of the greatest importance in the religion of Israel, especially after the division of the kingdom; for there Jeroboam raised one of his golden oxen, and since Bethel was situated on the southern boundary of the kingdom, not far from Jerusalem, this sanctuary was the most important of the rivals of the temple of Sion. It was called the king's sanctuary.² But although by the setting up of this image of an ox it was consecrated as a temple of Yahweh, the pilgrims who came there were also much given to the worship of a certain stone, which was probably situated within the consecrated area of the temple, while a sacred oak in the neighbourhood of the place had also a powerful attraction for them. This oak was called, for some unknown reason, "the oak of weeping." Now the priests and prophets of Yahweh were bent upon rooting out these primeval forms of worship; and on account of the importance of the city, they gave themselves more trouble to do so in this case than in that of similar national sanctuaries in other localities. This is why such repeated mention of the worship of Yahweh at Bethel is made in the legends about the Patriarchs;³ but it is not certain that the same stone is referred to in every case. The following story amongst others was called into existence by the desire to proclaim the high antiquity of the sanctuary there as a temple of Yahweh, and to make a sacred stone harmless:—

On his journey from Beersheba to Haran Jacob came to

¹ For example in 2 Kings xxiii. 14; Hosea iii. 4.

² Amos vii. 13.

³ For example, Genesis xii. 8; xiii. 4; xxxv. 1 sqq.

the Canaanite city Luz. Near this place he had to spend the night, for the sun went down, so he took a stone, which he found there, laid it under his head and fell asleep. But his sleep was not undisturbed, for in his dream he saw a ladder set upon the ground, the top of which reached to the vault of heaven, and on which angels of God climbed up and down. Meanwhile Yahweh stood by him and said: "I am Yahweh, the god of Abraham and Isaac! The land on which you are now sleeping I will give to you and to your posterity; and your descendants shall be innumerable as the dust of the earth, and you shall spread to all the countries under heaven, so that all men shall bless each other by making mention of you and of your posterity,¹ saying: 'God prosper you as Jacob and his children!' And, as for the season now coming, I will be with you and will protect you everywhere, until I have brought you back again to this land and accomplished all my promises to you."

Full of reverential awe and a certain holy terror Jacob woke, and as he thought of all he had seen and heard, he said in glad surprise: "Truly Yahweh is here too! I knew not that. What a dreadful place is this! It is no less than a house of God; it is a gate of heaven!" In the morning Jacob took the stone which had served him for a pillow and set it up as a *massebah*, and then anointed it with oil.

He took occasion from this appearance of the deity to call the city, which had hitherto been known as Luz, Bethel, that is "house-of-god." At the same time he made a vow that if Yahweh protected him on his journey, and provided food and clothing for him, so that he returned in prosperity to his parents' home, he would acknowledge him as his god, and would give him tithes of all his possessions, while the spot on which the anointed stone was raised should be a god's house to him.

¹ After an amended version; see also p. 141.

Let us be careful in thinking over this story not to water down its contents by ascribing modern notions to Jacob or the writer. To the question "Where is God?" we have been accustomed from childhood to hear the answer "Everywhere," so that it is difficult for us really to enter into the thoughts of men who had no idea of such an answer, but believed that their god was only present in certain places. If we are to understand antiquity, however, we must try to place ourselves at this point of view. In the conception of the Israelite who wrote our narrative, and of all those who surrounded him, Yahweh was confined to a definite place, just like a man. He lived in heaven, and sometimes came from thence to visit the earth. He did not come down to all places alike, however, but only to some few selected spots where he revealed himself in dreams and visions, or in personal intercourse, and where he heard the prayers of the faithful, while the offerings that had been brought there, rose up to him. It is true that Yahweh sometimes sent one of his messengers or angels with those he loved, so that they were under his indirect protection everywhere, but he himself was only to be found in certain places, which were considered sacred on this account, and were often up on hills, but sometimes on lower ground. Anyone who would see him, who had a favour to ask of him or an offering to bring him, must seek him at these spots.

This seems to us a very mistaken idea, and we are ready enough to accuse those who cling to it of narrowness. We are quite right in doing so; for the idea that the deity is only present in certain places shows a want of reflection; but it may well be that it was sometimes coupled with a far greater measure of religiousness than is to be met with in those who declare without hesitation that God is everywhere.

For it is not so much the contents of our creed as the way

by which we have arrived at our convictions that determines our religiousness; not what we believe, but how or why we believe it. If we declare that God is everywhere, only because we argue it out, as we may easily do, it proves nothing for the earnestness of our spiritual life; with this belief we may still live like heathens. On the other hand, take Jacob—to make the truth apparent in his person—as a type! He has to leave the tent of his father. It goes to his heart to do so, for it is sad to say farewell to those whom we love, and all the little spots to which tender recollections are bound. But the heaviest blow to him is this, that he must wander away from the sacred Beersheba. There Yahweh dwelt. There he had appeared again and again to his grandfather and father. There he had received their offerings and had blessed them. Nay, had not he himself passed many hours, he could never forget, in the shadow of the sacred tree? Had he not in times of trouble felt the consoling presence of his god? Had he not been terrified by the darkness that surrounded Yahweh, and filled with awe and wonder by the consuming fire? Now he must leave that consecrated spot and wander away through regions where Yahweh was not? How would it go with him on his journey? He would have to pass through deserts, to cross rivers, to brave the fury and the cunning of wild beasts—and all this without Yahweh by to help him! Or would this god, who had been so good to his family, send an angel to accompany him? Yahweh dwelt at Beersheba and by the well Lahai-roi, but yet he dwelt by the oak at Mamre and elsewhere too; might he not have a place of revelation somewhere here? How the wanderer longed to make him an offering! It would be such a comfort to him on his journey! Amid such thoughts he lays himself down in weariness to rest. He does not fear the wild beasts now. Yahweh, he hopes, will send a messenger

to protect him. And in his sleep he sees the ladder reared between earth and heaven, he sees Yahweh standing by him, and he hears the promise of protection, and then he wakes and cries out, "Yahweh is here too! This is a house-of-god!"

A faith which springs up in such a way as this is the fruit of religiousness; and this is the way in which the belief in holy places rose. Where the pious saw themselves particularly blessed or where important revelations were vouchsafed to them, where good thoughts rose within them or dangers were averted, there they said, "Our god is working here!" A great deal must often have taken place in the life and soul of a man then before he came to recognise a place as holy; nay, it often needed more reflection than it costs many a one to argue that since, as he has always heard, there is one almighty Being—God, this God is of course everywhere, because if he were not he would not be infinite and almighty.

For us every place is holy in which we have felt by experience that God exists, where we have mourned over our trespasses or have formed good resolutions, where holy thoughts have risen within us or some true consolation has fallen to our lot, where our vocation has become clearer before our eyes and faith in our destiny has been quickened. So we do not believe in our hearts that God is everywhere until we have found out that we can experience his presence in all places, and can receive his blessing everywhere if our heart is rightly tuned.

CHAPTER XXIV.

JACOB AND LABAN.

GEN. XXIX. — XXXII. 3.

TWO reasons for the departure of Jacob to Haran are given in Genesis. We have been told already that he went there through fear of Esau's vengeance; but we find another account besides this that differs very widely from it, and is evidently by another writer. It runs as follows :¹—

When Esau was forty years old he took two Canaanite wives² and they vexed the souls of Isaac and Rebekah. Rebekah, therefore, said to her husband, "I am grieved about these Hethite women. If Jacob were to follow Esau's example, and marry a woman of this country, I should wish to die." Acting upon his wife's exhortation, Isaac called Jacob to him, and, after having blessed him, gave him this injunction: "You must not take one of the inhabitants of this country for your wife; but go rather to Padan Aram, to the house of Bethuel, your mother's father, and choose a wife from among your kindred. And God Almighty (El-Shaddai) bless you and give you a numerous posterity, so that many tribes may spring from you! May he lay upon you and your posterity the blessing of Abraham, that you may have possession of the land in which you are a stranger, that he promised him!" Thus Isaac sent Jacob away to Padan Aram to Laban, the son of Bethuel the Aramæan (or Syrian). Now when Esau saw that his father had blessed Jacob, and sent him to Padan Aram to bring a wife thence, and had told him not to marry a Canaanite wife, he was reminded afresh of his parents' strong disapproval of his own marriage with women of the country; so he married a relative, an Ishmaelite woman, as well.

¹ Genesis xxvi. 34, 35; xxvii. 46—xxviii. 9.

² See p. 216.

It is easy to see that this story differs considerably from the one related in our last chapter but one. There Esau is the favourite of Isaac, who desires to bless him, and only makes Jacob the head of his brothers by mistake. Here, on the other hand, Isaac thinks just as Rebekah does about Esau. His marriages with Hethite wives are a thorn in the flesh of both, and induce Isaac knowingly and intentionally to call down the blessing of Abraham upon Jacob's head. There Jacob obtains the birthright and his father's blessing in an underhand manner. Here he is the obedient son, who goes to Mesopotamia to seek a wife after the heart of his parents, so as not to forfeit their favour as Esau had done. Now attempts have been made to bring these two stories into agreement with each other, by saying that Rebekah represented to Isaac how desirable it would be for Jacob to marry one of his own kindred, simply in order to gain his consent to the departure of his younger son; but there is not a single word that points to this conclusion; and if it is correct, then surely Isaac is made out a most feeble creature, for he renews, of his own free will and without a word of reproach, the blessing gained in the first instance by a fraud. Nor can we understand how Esau could determine to marry an Ishmaelite wife "because Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him to Padan Aram to fetch a wife" if the blessing had really been stolen already.

In the account of Jacob's departure from Beersheba to seek a wife among his kindred, we have a portion of the Book of Origins before us; and here as elsewhere¹ that work gives but colourless figures to the patriarchs. There were some old legends, on the other hand, that gave Jacob very characteristic features; for his name that was interpreted "deceiver"² led the popular tradition to describe him as a crafty man, and in this character he actually appears

¹ See pp. 138, 139.

² Genesis xxvii. 36.

in one set of the legends concerning him. In others, on the contrary, he is simply sketched as the blessed one of his god, whose help he can never celebrate enough. Here is the story that has grown out of the union of these two sets of legends, in the form in which we now have it :—

After he had received the promises of God's protection at Bethel, Jacob went on to the land of the men of the East. When he reached it he came upon some flocks of sheep and goats pasturing round a well in a plain. Jacob was surprised to see this, for it was before noon, and he wondered why the shepherds did not water their flocks and then drive them further on their way. As he wanted to find out the reason of their conduct, he entered into conversation with them and asked them where they came from. "We are men of Haran" was the reply. Haran! then he had reached his journey's end already! He asked for information about his kindred at once. "Do you know Laban, the son of Nahor?" They said they did, and in answer to further questions Jacob learned that his uncle was doing well, and that they were expecting his daughter Rachel to arrive with her flocks every moment. This brought him back to the point that had first led him to address them, so he asked, "Why are you wasting your time at the well here? For it is too soon to collect the flocks." "We cannot water our flocks," they said, "till we are all here and can unite our strength to roll away the stone that lies over the mouth of the well."

He was still talking with them, when behold Rachel drew near with her father's flocks. No sooner did Jacob see her with the cattle of his mother's brother, than he strode up to the mouth of the well and with the strength of a giant rolled away the stone, and then watered the flocks. Rachel looked on in amazement, which soon made way, however, for joyful surprise, when the stranger came up to her and, greeting her with a kiss and bursting into tears of joy, made himself

known as her cousin, the son of Rebekah. She hurried back to her father, who came with all speed to meet Jacob, and when he found him, embraced and brought him home affectionately. Then Jacob had to tell his story, and when it was over Laban cried, "You are my own flesh and blood! Look upon my house as upon that of your father!"

Now, when Jacob had been with Laban a month, helping him to pasture his flocks, his uncle said to him, "See, you are like a brother to me! why should you serve me for nothing? Tell me what your wages shall be." Jacob soon had an answer ready; for he had fallen in love with Rachel, his younger cousin, who was far more beautiful than her sister Leah, whose eyes were dull. He offered, therefore, to serve his uncle seven years for the hand of Rachel. Laban consented. For Jacob the seven years flew past like a few days, for he loved Rachel so, and when they were over he demanded her in marriage, and Laban, like a man of his word, consented. But when the wedding day came he made difficulties about it, and compelled Jacob to marry Leah instead of Rachel, since it was not right, he said, for the younger to be married before the elder sister. To make it right again, however, he proposed that Jacob should marry Rachel as well, and then serve him for seven more years, and to this the disappointed Jacob consented.

But though the precedence had thus been given Leah, Jacob still loved Rachel most. It seemed, however, as if Yahweh had determined to make up for this slight, for while her sister remained childless Leah gave birth to four sons, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. Rachel, in her jealousy of Leah, determined to "build up her house by her slave girl," as Sarah had done.¹ So she gave her servant Bilhah to Jacob as a secondary wife; and she had two sons, Dan and Naphtali, of whom Rachel was just as proud as if they

¹ See p. 163.

had been her own children. But Leah, fearing to be outdone by her sister, determined to adopt the same means of increasing the number of her own sons. So she gave her slave girl Zilpah to Jacob for a wife. Gad and Asher sprang from this union, and when Leah herself had a fifth son, Issachar, and then a sixth, Zebulon, and finally a daughter, Dinah, Rachel was thoroughly defeated. But at last Yahweh thought of her, and she too had a son. This child, for whom she had waited so long, she called Joseph.

When this happiness had befallen Jacob the desire rose in his heart of returning to the land of his birth, and before long he asked Laban's leave to go. But the latter by no means fell in with the plan. He declared at once that Jacob had served him well, and even that Yahweh had evidently blessed him for his sake; and so he pressed him earnestly to stay with him. If he would do so he might name his own terms. Jacob declared that though he was quite aware that while he had had charge of his uncle's flocks they had increased enormously, yet he would be content with but a small reward, one of no significance at all in fact—all the speckled and spotted sheep and goats should be his share. Laban agreed, and as soon as the animals were sorted he separated his flocks so far from those of his son-in-law that it was impossible they should get mixed. But Jacob was too cunning for him. He himself fed the flocks of his uncle, who had a high opinion of his skill as a herdsman. But this skill now enabled Jacob to look after himself. He knew all kinds of tricks for managing that most of the lambs should be born spotted or piebald, and he plied his arts so cleverly that he soon became very very rich, not only in small cattle but in male and female slaves, in camels and in asses.

But a rich man is soon envied, as Jacob now discovered. Laban's sons complained that their father suffered great loss by the arrangement he had made. They could not bear

the sight of Jacob's prosperity. Their words gradually began to have some effect upon Laban himself, and Jacob soon perceived that his father-in-law was no longer so favourably disposed towards him as he had formerly been. Then Yahweh commanded him to go back to Canaan. So Jacob called Rachel and Leah and put the whole matter before them :—" Your father," he said, " is no longer what he was to me. But it is not my fault. The god of my father has helped me, and you know how faithfully I have served your father. But he has not treated me well. He has altered the terms of my service ten times, but God has not allowed him to injure me by it ; for if we had agreed that I was to have all the piebald lambs and kids, then all the sheep and goats dropped piebald young ; but if on the other hand we had agreed that my wage was to consist of all the speckled ones, then speckled young kept coming into the world. Thus God has given me all your father's wealth. Indeed he foretold as much to me in a dream, in which he said that he would make all the lambs just of the very sort that was to be my share, because your father treated me so badly. Moreover he made himself known to me as the god of Bethel, where I raised that anointed stone." Rachel and Leah thought that their husband was quite right. They declared that they were altogether severed from their father's house and had still more to complain of than Jacob had himself ; for they were indignant with their father for having sold them as if they were strangers, and were of opinion that the whole of the wealth that God had taken from their father's property belonged to them and to their sons. They declared, therefore, that they were quite ready to comply with Jacob's wishes.

So once when Laban was at a sheep-shearers' feast, Jacob took the opportunity of making off, taking all his property with him, and at the same time Rachel took her

father's household gods (*teraphim*) with her. Jacob set out on the way to Canaan, crossed the Euphrates, directed his course towards the mountains of Gilead, and had just reached them, on the seventh day, when he was overtaken by Laban, who had not heard of his departure till the third day after he had gone. Laban was very angry, especially about the household gods having been stolen, and had no very gentle thoughts as regarded his nephew. So the meeting might have been a very unpleasant one and might even have ended in bloodshed, if God had not helped his favourite and warned Laban not to do him any kind of harm. As it was, all went off quietly, though Laban reproached Jacob for having slipped away without warning, and declared that if he had known of his intention he would have given him a festal escort. Jacob excused himself by saying that he had been afraid that Laban would not leave his daughters free to accompany him.

But when Laban accused him of having taken away the *teraphim*, he stoutly maintained his innocence, and gave his father-in-law leave to search all the tents, declaring that anyone in whose possession the stolen goods were found should be put to death. This was a rash promise; for he ought to have remembered that a great deal might have gone on that he knew nothing about. Rachel, however, who had not told her husband what she had done, managed to escape detection; for she hid the *teraphim* in the pannier that was usually fixed on the camel's back to carry the women, and then went and lay down on it herself, pretending to be ill; and when her father came to search the tent, she begged him not to be offended with her for not rising, as she was unwell. So he could not find what he had lost; and Jacob assumed a tone of injured innocence and said: "Now just see what you have been hunting me down in this way for! What injury have I done you? What have I stolen from you?"

Have I not always served you faithfully these twenty years—fourteen years for your daughters and six years for your cattle? Have I not looked after your interests at the cost of my own? And all you have done has been to change my wage ten times, so that if the god of Abraham and the Terror of Isaac had not helped me, I should have been a beggar when I left you.”

Laban now dropped all hostile intentions and proposed to Jacob that they should make an alliance together. Jacob agreed, and raised a *massebah*. Then the dependents of both of them raised a great heap of stones, by which they took their meal. They called this artificial hill of stones “the heap of the witness,” which is “Gilead” in Hebrew. It has given its name to a certain district beyond the Jordan. Then Laban cried, “God bear witness that when we have left each other you are to treat my daughters well, and marry no more wives! Moreover this heap of stones and this *massebah* are witnesses that we will never cross this boundary with hostile intentions towards each other. May the gods of Abraham and of Nahor judge between us!” Then they swore to observe this covenant—Jacob’s oath being in the name of the Terror of Isaac. After that Jacob prepared a feast in celebration of the covenant, and next morning each of them went on his way.

When Jacob was pursuing his journey again there came angels of God to meet him, and when he saw them he exclaimed, “It is a camp (*Mahanim*) of God!” So the place is called Mahanaim.

We should certainly have placed but small reliance on this oath of Jacob, and for the best of reasons! How can we rest anything upon the faith of a man who plays such a shameful part as Jacob does in this affair? He cheats his father-in-law,—who is certainly just as bad as he is himself

however,—he sees his own possessions constantly increasing and those of Laban diminishing in consequence of all kinds of tricks that he practises, and yet the name of God is ever on his lips, he speaks to his wives of their father's injustice, complains of his want of kindly feeling towards him, and talks about the blessing of God by which he has grown rich. A most repulsive figure! Nay, a depth of immorality that makes us shudder is opened before us, for what is more detestable than for a man to have the name of God in his mouth and faithlessness in his heart.

Not to do the Israelites the injustice of supposing that they saw no harm in such a dishonest way of life, we must bear in mind what I mentioned before beginning to tell the story, namely, that it is put together out of two legends. In the one Jacob becomes rich at Laban's cost by his dishonourable practices, whereas in the other he is represented as an honourable man who is cheated by Laban, first of all on occasion of his marriage, and afterwards by constant changing of his wages; but all this only brings out more and more clearly the faithfulness of his god, who blesses him with children and with wealth, who restrains Laban from injuring him, and whose angels he meets by the Jordan.

The writers of these original stories had of course certain definite objects before them. One of these objects comes very clearly into view. The writer, namely, who gives us such a detailed account of the birth of Jacob's children, adding the explanation of their names—which I have omitted, however, because it can only be understood when we have the Hebrew words from which they are said to be derived before us,—this writer desired to assign its proper rank to each of the tribes of Israel. With the exception of Benjamin, whose birth has not been mentioned yet, the tribe of Joseph, that is of Ephraim and Manasseh, occupies the first place in his estimation. It is true that Joseph is

not the eldest son, that is to say, that other tribes had gained settled abodes and become influential at an earlier period ; but he is the son of the dearly-loved Rachel ; he is the long expected one, after whose birth Jacob desires at once to return to Canaan as if the object of his stay in a foreign land were now accomplished. After the two-fold tribe of Joseph came Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulon as being of purer Israelite blood than the other tribes. This is why they are called the children of Leah, a wife of the first rank. The tribes on the other hand, that are said to be the children of the slaves, are of less noble blood in the writer's estimation.

Again, these legends teach the lesson that friendly relations ought to subsist between Israel and Aram or Syria ; explain the origin of the worship of *teraphim* in Israel ; and above all declare emphatically that the Israelites, unlike the Edomites, have no Canaanite blood in their veins, and in this way vehemently oppose matrimonial alliances with the Canaanites, in which many Israelites saw no harm. In later times we shall hear of this disputed point again and again.

The accounts of Jacob's cunning lead us to ask what idea of honour the writer can have had. In speaking of the legends of Abraham we could not help noticing that the feelings of the ancient Israelites on this point were none of the finest ;¹ and here we have a further proof of the fact. But we must be careful not to exaggerate. We must not suppose that at the time when this story was composed, that is to say after the division of the kingdom, the Israelites had still so little idea of honesty as not to disapprove of Jacob's conduct towards Esau, Isaac, and Laban. They were not so morally dull as that, or at least the more enlightened

¹ Pp. 143, 144.

amongst them were not. The commandment:—thou shalt not steal! had not been a dead letter amongst them. The law-givers settled a penalty for theft, namely that the thief was to restore at least twice as much as he had stolen.¹ The proverb-makers, or sages, whose object was above everything to promote goodness, condemned both stealing and under-hand trickery in the strongest terms. They considered it quite right that a thief should be punished even if it were to satisfy his hunger that he had stolen.² They were zealous against the use of false weights and measures, and called a deceitful pair of scales and a double ephah (a certain measure for dry wares) an abomination in the sight of Yahweh.³ They uttered warnings against removing boundary stones and thereby appropriating a part of the fields of orphans.⁴ The truth that ill-gotten wealth does not thrive, lived in their hearts, and was expressed in their predictions, “Who sows iniquity shall reap adversity;”⁵ “A possession that grows too fast at first will not be blessed at last;”⁶ “However good stolen bread may taste after a while it turns to sand in the mouth.”⁷ Nor did liars or men of a double heart⁸ find mercy at the hands of Israel’s preachers of righteousness, for they mentioned the tongue of deceit among the things that Yahweh hates,⁹ and spoke in praise of eyes that look straight before them.¹⁰ It need hardly be said that the prophets of Israel never spared the thief or cheat, but inveighed against dishonesty and under-hand proceedings with all their power.¹¹

Now the writer of our story no doubt quite agreed with those who were so zealous against all kinds of cheating. He never thought of approving of the conduct of Jacob, according

¹ Exodus xxii. 4.

² Proverbs vi. 30, 31, after an amended version.

³ Proverbs xi. 1; xx. 10, 23.

⁴ Proverbs xv. 25; xxii. 28; xxiii. 10.

⁵ Proverbs xxii. 8.

⁶ Proverbs xx. 21.

⁷ Proverbs xx. 17.

⁸ Proverbs xi. 20.

⁹ Proverbs vi. 17.

¹⁰ Proverbs iv. 25.

¹¹ Amos viii. 5, for example.

to his own account of him. And yet we can see, from the way in which he tells us about him, that he had no very high standard of honesty; for he evidently took a certain delight in Jacob's cunning. He speaks of the patriarch's tricks with the same kind of pleasure that many of us too feel in hearing of ingenious plots and cleverly executed knaveries. But the one thing that is worst of all, and that really does need some explanation, is that the wealth obtained by Jacob, in consequence of all this cheating, is called a blessing of Yahweh. How is it possible? That a man may grow rich by dishonest means is but too true; but if anyone who had done so were to say that he had become possessed of his wealth by the blessing of God, we should consider him a hypocrite. And yet this writer, who represents Jacob as a cheat, and condemns his conduct, acknowledges at the same moment that these knaveries enabled him, by the blessing of his god, to obtain the right of the firstborn son, his father's blessing, and the greatest wealth. How is this to be explained? In this story we have one of the results of nature-worship before us. The Israelites saw the hand of their god especially in the phenomena of nature and in prosperity or adversity; so that riches, honour, health, and a number of children, were regarded as the consequences of the favour of their god; and poverty, sickness, and childlessness were signs of his displeasure. Such a god is not a morally good being, and may do all kinds of things from mere caprice or even from ignoble motives. Is not nature often fickle and capricious? Can we find any reason connected with the demands of the moral law why the lightning should strike one man's house and spare another's? Surely not! A successful man was said by the Israelite to be blessed by God. But suppose a man had become rich by cheating? Well, in that case he was a bad man; but still he was blessed by God. They could not argue otherwise; for a nature-god is not a morally

good being. And so it was possible for a man to attribute base actions to his god and yet be religious ; to be zealous for his honour and ready to sacrifice himself to him if need were, and yet at the same time to be of a very low moral type.

This was the position of the Israelites, as of all ancient peoples. It is true that from the time of Moses onward the moral requirements of God were placed more and more in the foreground, but they were never very closely connected with religion properly so called ; and the Israelites never got quite beyond the imperfect views of nature-worship. Even among Christians there are many who still hold them. We must not think it hypocrisy, then, if a king, who takes violent possession of a part of the territory of his neighbour, calls upon the Lord of Hosts as he does so, and appears to see in the victories he has won a proof of God's approbation of what he has done. It is conceivable that he is quite sincere in this. He may be a religious man. But in this case his god is a nature-god and not much more.

It is only when we have learned to see in God above all the perfectly Good, the morally Holy, so as to feel that our consciences are bound by him and that we are dependent on him in all we do or leave undone ; it is only then that it becomes impossible for us to tell a lie and yet be zealous for God, or to think that he will send his blessing upon the frauds of men.

CHAPTER XXV.

JACOB'S RETURN TO THE FATHERLAND.

GEN. XXXII. 3. — XXXIII. 20., XXXV.

WHEN Jacob had broken up his camp at Mahanaim, so the account goes on, he began to fear that a meeting with his brother Esau might lead to anything but pleasant consequences. They had so little in common ! So he sent

an embassy to Mount Seir to inform his brother that he had grown rich with Laban, and now desired his friendship. The messengers soon returned with the news that Esau, at the head of four hundred men, was coming to meet his brother. Terrified by this information, Jacob separated his servants and flocks, with a heavy heart, into two caravans, anxiously thinking as he did so, "Even if Esau attacks and destroys one of them, yet the other may escape!"

When he had completed these precautionary arrangements he prayed, "O Yahweh, god of Abraham and of Isaac! thou who hast commanded me to turn again to the country of my birth, and hast promised that all shall be well with me! I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness thou hast shown thy servant, for I crossed this river Jordan with nothing but the staff I held in my hand, and now I have grown into two companies. O rescue me from the power of my brother Esau! For I fear that with unsparing ferocity he will destroy everything, even the mother that hides her children with her body. O rescue me, for thou hast said to me, 'I will make all well with you, and will multiply your offspring as the sand on the sea shore.'"

Next morning he took still further precautions. He prepared a rich present of hundreds of sheep, goats, oxen, camels, and asses. Each kind of animal was given separately in charge to several shepherds; they were to be driven, a flock at a time, to meet Esau, and the shepherds were all instructed what to answer when Esau met them and asked whose dependants they were, where they were going, and for whom all these animals were intended. They were to reply, "We are servants of Jacob, who sends this present to Esau, and is following us himself." By this means he hoped to make a favourable impression upon his more powerful and warlike brother, and so to secure a gracious reception at his hands.

When it was night again he sent his wives and children and all his property across the ferry of the river Jabbok, while he himself remained behind alone, and no human eye, therefore, witnessed what now took place. A man came and wrestled with Jacob until break of day, and when he saw that he could not overcome the patriarch he grasped his hip, twisted it out of joint as he wrestled with him, and said, "Let me go, for it is day already!" But Jacob answered, "No! not till you have blessed me!" Then his adversary asked him, "What is your name?" and on being told that it was Jacob he said, "Henceforward you shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel (striver-of-god), for you have striven with god and man and given proof of your might." Still only half content, Jacob said to him, "Tell me what is your name;" this, however, the unknown visitant refused to do, but he pronounced a solemn blessing upon him and disappeared. Then Jacob called the place Penuel, that is *face-of-god*, because he had seen God there face to face, and nevertheless remained alive. Then as he crossed the Jabbok the sun rose. The patriarch limped in consequence of the dislocation of his hip; and that is why the Israelites never eat the hip sinew of any animal.

When Jacob had reached the further side of the Jabbok, the meeting he so much dreaded must soon take place. In the distance he sees Esau with four hundred warriors drawing near. There is just time to carry out one more measure. The two slave-wives and their children are placed in the front part of the caravan, then comes Leah with her children, and lastly, quite in the rear, the most precious treasure of all—Rachel with her son Joseph. Jacob himself takes the lead. Then Esau draws near, while his brother falls humbly seven times upon the ground before him. But see! his fear was needless, for Esau hastens to meet him, falls upon his neck and kisses him. The two brothers burst into tears of

joy. "Who are these?" asks Esau, glancing at Jacob's wives and their children. "These are the sons with which God has blessed your servant" is Jacob's humble answer. Bilhah and Zilpah draw near with their sons and bow down before the mighty Esau, then Leah with her six, and lastly the most dearly-loved of all with her one son. "And for whom is all that army that met me on my way?" asks the Bedouin prince. "It is a present for you," answers Jacob, "that you may be gracious to me." "I have abundance already," replies the lord of Seir, "keep what is your own." But Jacob, to whom his brother's favour is of such vast consequence, presses it upon him, saying, "Ah no! do me the favour of accepting my present, for I am rejoiced to see your face, that is like the face of a god to me, and you receive me so kindly! Take what I offer you, for God has made me rich."

Esau soon proposed to Jacob that they should stay together; but the shepherd prince, much as he rejoiced to see his brother, did not think this a suitable arrangement, and objected that his caravan included little children, and sheep and cattle still suckling their young, that would die if driven too hard even a single day. He must accommodate himself to the state of his own affairs; which was more than could be expected of Esau. It would be better therefore for the latter to go on to Mount Seir in advance, and he would join him there. Esau's offer to leave part of his escort to protect his brother was also declined; and the two went on their several ways, Esau to Seir and Jacob to Succoth. Here he built a house and some cattle-sheds, after which he called the place Succoth, that is *sheds*. From Succoth the journey led to Shechem, and—Jacob was once more in Canaan! At Shechem he bought the piece of land on which he had encamped from the inhabitants, and raised an altar there and called it "the god of gods of Israel."¹

¹ After an amended version.

At Shechem he received commandment to go to Bethel, and to raise an altar there to the god who had appeared to him on his outward journey, when he was fleeing from Esau. In order to perform this duty in a becoming way, Jacob first ordered his followers to put away all the foreign gods they worshipped, and to purify themselves by changing their clothes and washing themselves. All these gods and the amulets that the members of his household carried in their ears were buried at the foot of the sacred tree, the "teacher's oak,"¹ at Shechem. Great fear took hold of all the surrounding tribes, so that they let Jacob pass in safety; and when he came to Bethel he raised an altar there, and called it "the god of Bethel," because the deity had formerly appeared to him there.

Here Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died. They buried her to the south of Bethel, under an oak, which was called after this circumstance Allon-bachuth, "the oak of weeping." Hence they travelled southwards, to the region of Ephrath, but before they reached it Rachel had a second son, whose birth cost her her life. The dying mother called her son Ben-oni, "son of anguish," but Jacob called him Benjamin, "son of the right hand," that is to say, "son of fortune," for when a wizard stood with his face to the east appearances in the south, which would be to his right, were considered fortunate. An anointed stone was raised at Rachel's grave, and was afterwards known as "the stone of Rachel's grave." Thence they passed on to Migdal-eder, "the tower of the flock," where Jacob pitched his tents.

Thus had the wanderer returned to the land of his birth.

This story does not come from the same hand as the pictures of Jacob deceiving his brother, father, and uncle; nor should we say, from reading it, that Esau had so many

¹ See p. 141.

good reasons for hating Jacob. The latter is indeed afraid of his brother, looks forward with anxiety to the meeting, and even says that his present "must appease the countenance of Esau,"¹ but neither in his prayer for help nor in what he says to his brother is there a single word about any offence he has committed, nor does Esau appear to think of any for a moment. Now, we have no account from this writer of the occasion of Jacob's departure to Haran; for all he said on the subject seems to have been dropped when the legends were thrown together. We may, indeed, gather from one or two expressions that, even according to his representation, Jacob's fear was not without sufficient grounds, for when God reminded him of his having appeared to him at Luz he said² that he had revealed himself to him "when he was fleeing from Esau;" but it by no means follows that Jacob had given him cause to feel bitterly towards him by practising deceits at his expense. The only word that seems to refer to anything of the kind is the one just quoted, namely, that Jacob desired to "appease" Esau; and even this does not prove that Jacob was conscious of having done anything wrong; for the author of Proverbs xvi. 14, for instance, in saying that "the king's wrath is a message of death, and a wise man, therefore, seeks to appease him," does not mean to say that a king is never angry without sufficient reason. As it is uncertain, therefore, whether any account of Jacob's deception preceded this account of the meeting of the brothers, I have not ventured to represent Esau as the pattern of a forgiving disposition, which he would certainly have been, to a great extent, if he had had such good reasons for anger as those mentioned by the other writer. I have only represented Esau then as a powerful and rough, but liberal and generous, Bedouin chief, kindly disposed towards his weaker and more cultivated and prudent brother.

¹ Genesis xxxii. 20.² Genesis xxxv. 1, 7.

The materials from which the portion of the legend of Jacob, of which we have now spoken, is formed, are of many kinds. The desire to explain names and usages was evidently a powerful incentive to the author. He gives us derivations of the names Mahanaim, Penuel, Jabbok (an allusion to which is contained in the Hebrew word that means "to wrestle"), Israel, Succoth, Allon-bachuth, and Benjamin; and the significance of the practice of refraining from eating the hip sinew, of the sacred oak, and the consecrated stone at Shechem, of the *massebah* at Bethel, and of Rachel's grave, is pointed out.

Here we have another account of the stone at Bethel. This writer had indeed mentioned that Jacob had a dream at Bethel, but the account of his raising a *massebah*¹ was from the hand of the writer who uses the divine name Yahweh. The great interest felt by the Israelites in this stone, this "god of Bethel," as it is called in so many words² in this story, is shown by the fact that both these writers devote their attention to it. Moreover it is mentioned again in the Book of Origins; for though the author of that work treated the fortunes of the patriarchs so briefly, he devoted several verses³ to the remarkable stone at Bethel and to the origin of the name of the place. He tells us that God appeared to Jacob after his return from Padan Aram, blessed him, altered his name from Jacob to Israel, and foretold that there should be kings amongst his descendants, and that they should have possession of Canaan. After this appearance of God, Jacob gave the Canaanite city Luz the name of Bethel, "house-of-god," and anointed a sacred stone there.

A word must be said about the account of Rachel's grave. It is said, by way of fixing the spot, that she died after they

¹ See chapter xxiii.

² Genesis xxxv. 7.

³ Genesis xxxv. 6 (first part), 9—15.

had left Bethel and were still some distance from Ephrath, and that Jacob having buried her on the spot, went on and came to Migdal-eder.¹ Now to the name "Ephrath" an explanatory note "that is Bethlehem" is added, both here and in a later passage where Rachel's grave is mentioned.² Rachel's grave accordingly may be found marked on the maps near Bethlehem. On our map, however, it has a note of interrogation placed after it there,³ because this addition, "Ephrath is Bethlehem" is perhaps a mistake. The district of Ephrath lay in the territory of Benjamin, a little to the south of Bethel, north therefore of Jerusalem, as is indicated indeed in the story itself.

The point that excites our attention most in the account of Jacob's return, is his wrestling with God. To us there is something so extraordinary and even shocking, alike to head and heart, in the representation of a man wrestling bodily with God, that we can hardly imagine how thoughtful and religious men could ever have related such a story. Yet this is clearly what is meant; for though the Being with whom Jacob has been wrestling gives him no answer when he asks his name, yet the fact that he is a divine being comes out clearly enough in the explanation of the name Israel, "You have striven with God (or with gods) and men," and also in Jacob's exclamation when he calls the place Penuel "face-of-god," namely "I have seen God face to face and am yet living." So too the legend is understood by the prophet Hosea, when he mentions, in allusion to it, Jacob's wrestling with God or with an angel.⁴ We see moreover that it is no symbolical wrestling,—no continuous entreaty, for instance,—but a veritable bodily conflict that is intended, from the trait of the dislocation of Jacob's hip,

¹ Genesis xxxv. 16—21.² Genesis xlviii. 7.³ See map iv. Jerusalem and its neighbourhood.⁴ Hosea xii. 4, 5.

from which the custom of never eating the hip-sinew is explained. The real origin of this custom, which is only referred to here and in a single passage in the Talmud, is quite unknown.

We cannot help asking how in the world people got hold of such ideas. To find a proper answer to this question, we must remember in the first place that we are now in the region of polytheism (belief in many gods). The belief that there is one only God is entirely wanting in the old Israelite legends. We have often noticed this fact already, and the name of the anointed stone at Shechem—"the god of gods of Israel"—is a fresh proof of it. Even if we translate the expression here used, "El is the god of Israel," which it may also mean, it makes no real difference; for if a man can speak of "a god of Israel" or "a god of Bethel," he does not recognise the unity of God. It stands to reason that if a man believes in the existence of a number of gods, the interval between gods and men is far smaller and the intercourse between the two far more familiar in his conception than if the name "God" make him think of one single, infinite, perfect Being.

Stories of struggles between gods and men, in which the immortals sometimes come off second best, are to be found amongst the most different nations. Thus, we are told in Homer's "Iliad" that the Greek hero Diomede, who was protected in the fight with the Trojans by the goddess Athene, at her instigation wounded the goddess Aphrodite (who was hastening to the help of her son Æneas), with his lance. The god Apollo, however—though the bold warrior did not shrink from even him—compelled him at last to retreat; but when the fierce and warlike god Ares mingled in the fight, Diomede was not only protected by Athene from the lance hurled at him by this god, but was even enabled by her help to wound him so severely that he went back,

with a frightful shriek, to heaven again ! So, too, among the Hindoos it was the duty of kings to take the field with club and bow against the supernatural powers of evil ; and in their heroic poems and dramas, the scenes in which the princes attack these spirits are vividly put before us. In the same way, too, according to the myths of our forefathers and the peoples related to them, not only do the gods often fight with each other, but the god Thor in particular is frequently challenged to fight by the giants, and the heroes again and again defy these superhuman powers.

We will select one example from the Norman sagas.

There was once a king called Heidrek, who was at enmity with Gestr the blind, because the latter, who was very unrighteous, would not pay him tribute. Once on a time Gestr, as he thought, came to see him, but in reality it was no other than the god Odin himself, who had taken the blind man's shape. The king promised to let him off the debt if he could beat him at riddles. Gestr accepted the offer, and asked Heidrek one-and-thirty riddles, all of which, however, were answered by the prince, till at last his blind guest asked him what it was that Odin whispered in the ear of the god Balder when he lay dead upon the funeral pile. On this Heidrek recognised the god ; but far from showing him any reverence, he called him a wicked devil and a dragon, and drew his sword upon him. Odin changed himself into a falcon, but the feathers of his tail were cut short by the stroke of Heidrek's sword. That is why the falcon still has a stumpy tail. Odin flew away with threats of vengeance.

Clearly to understand how it was possible for stories of conflicts between gods and men to spring up, we must form a vivid conception of the origin of these gods themselves. They are the powers of nature. Man had often to yield to these powers ; and when he worshipped them, there-

fore, he did so in fear and under a sense of dependence; but he often defied them too, and must not always yield to them.

A good example of the conflict between man and the powers of nature may be found in Longfellow's poem of "Hiawatha." It is founded upon the traditions of the North American Indians:—

Kabibonokka, the fierce north wind, dwells among the icebergs and perpetual snowdrifts in the land of "Wabasso," the white rabbit.

Once the fierce Kabibonokka
Issued from his lodge of snowdrifts,
From his home among the icebergs,
And his hair, with snow besprinkled,
Streamed behind him like a river,
Like a black and wintry river,
As he howled and hurried southward,
Over frozen lakes and moorlands.

Here he finds Shingebis, the diver, lingering in the cold regions, whence all his tribe, and even the heron and the wild goose, have long departed.

Cried the fierce Kabibonokka,
"Who is this that dares to brave me?"

I will go into his wigwam,
I will put his smouldering fire out!"
And at night Kabibonokka
To the lodge came wild and wailing,
Heaped the snow in drifts about it,
Shouted down into the smoke flue,
Shook the lodge poles in his fury,
Flapped the curtain of the doorway.

But Shingebis has plenty of fuel and plenty of food, and only laughs at Kabibonokka. Even when the latter comes in to him, though he feels his icy breath, he only gives the log a turn, and sings and laughs as before, till Kabibonokka can bear it no longer, and rushes out into the cold again,

and, stamping on the frozen lakes, freezes them yet harder, and challenges Shingebis to come out and wrestle with him naked upon the ice. Shingebis accepts the challenge, and Kabibonokka wrestles all night with the bold diver.

Till his (Kabibonokka's) panting breath grew fainter,
Till his frozen grasp grew feebler,
Till he reeled and staggered backward,
And retreated, baffled, beaten,
To the kingdom of Wabasso,
To the land of the White Rabbit,
Hearing still the gusty laughter,
Hearing Shingebis, the diver,
Singing "O Kabibonokka,
You are but my fellow mortal!"

So in the celebrated poem of the Swedish Tegnèr, the Frithiof's saga, the hero Frithiof kills Ham, the winter wind, and Hejd, the hailstorm, with his spears.

What we now consider a poetical mode of speaking was literally true to the ancients. With spear, club, arrow, or sword the heroes fought against the hostile powers of nature, against the gods. The Israelite, too, when he had to brave the violence of storm and lightning, of the scorching east wind, or of a water-spout, recognised in these phenomena gods who desired his destruction. His highly-wrought imagination, the fruit of fear and ignorance, taught him actually to see these beings rushing wildly about him. If he was killed by the lightning, people said he was overcome by the deity; but if he escaped the danger by his intrepidity then he had triumphed over the god; and even if he had been wounded he could still boast of having won the victory, for though the mighty god had wounded him, yet he had been unable to kill him. So too a stroke or a fit of epilepsy was supposed to be an attack by some god, and even an accident, such as being struck by the fall of a tree or stone,

or anything else, was believed to have been designed by some deity who was intent on taking the life of the individual in question. If he escaped uninjured therefore, or only wounded, he had parried the onset of the god.

These ideas gave rise to the stories of conflicts between gods and men; for the poets worked out the mythological expressions until they had made them into legends. The story of Jacob's wrestling was naturally suggested to the writer who recounts it by the name Israel, which he desired to ascribe to the patriarch of whom he was speaking, as the ancestor of the people of Israel, and which he interpreted, quite incorrectly however, as "warrior-of-god."

Of all these legends, as we saw just now, the Book of Origins has nothing but the mention of the stone at Bethel. It does not even tell us that while Jacob was away Esau moved to Seir. It simply gives the names of Jacob's twelve sons and tells us¹ that when he came back from Padan Aram he returned to his father Isaac again, and, not long after, the latter died at the age of a hundred and eighty, and was buried by his two sons. They lived together like brothers, until their possessions became so numerous that they could no longer stay together. Then they parted, as Abram and Lot had done before them, and Esau settled in Mount Seir.

In another connection we shall speak of a saga that is told us in connection with Jacob's stay at Shechem,² but which could not be understood at present without a longer digression than our readers would find pleasant.

¹ Genesis xxxv. 23—29; xxxvi. 6—8.

² Genesis xxxiv.

CHAPTER XXVI.

JOSEPH, THE FAVOURED OF YAHWEH.

GEN. XXXVII., XXXIX. — XLI.

FROM this point in the patriarchal narratives Jacob steps into the back-ground, and Joseph becomes the chief character, and his greatness the favourite theme. We shall divide the stories about him into three sets. First we shall see how the blessing of his god was always upon him, then how he became a mighty ruler and lord even over his own relatives, and finally how he protected them.

Israel's son Joseph, a lad of seventeen, served his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, as a shepherd,¹ and as he always told their father when they did anything wrong he was thoroughly hated by them. Israel loved Joseph more than his other sons, because he was born to him in his old age; and he clothed him in a regal robe. But this preference of Joseph by his father roused the envy of his brothers so strongly that they could not speak a friendly word to him. Matters became still worse when Joseph told them once a dream that he had had. "I dreamed," said he, "that we were all binding sheaves in the field together, and all at once my sheaf stood up on end and stayed upright, and all your sheaves came round it and fell down before it." "Oh, indeed!" sneered his brothers, "so you're to be our king and to rule over us, are you?" If all this increased their hatred, it became more bitter yet when something of the same kind happened again, and Joseph told them that he had had another dream, and that this time it was the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars that bowed down before him. Even his father, however much disposed to find everything that was good in his best beloved son, rebuked him now,

¹ After an amended version.

and said to him, "What! shall I and your mother and your brothers—shall we come to do homage to you?" But while the only effect of these events upon Joseph's brothers was to increase their hatred towards him, his father thought a great deal of them, and pondered over them deeply. And he had good reason! For these dreams were sent by Yahweh to announce the future greatness of Jacob's son, and this repetition of the same idea under various forms was a most emphatic prediction.

For the present, however, there did not seem much chance of the dream being fulfilled; and Joseph soon had a very substantial proof of the hatred of his brothers. For once upon a time they were pasturing the cattle near Shechem, and Joseph was sent by Jacob to ask after their welfare and that of the cattle. In obedience to his father's commands, Joseph went to look for them. On his way he understood from a man whom he met at Shechem that they had gone on to Dothan. So he followed them there. Now when they saw him in the distance they conceived the thought of murdering him. "There's our dreamer coming!" said they. "Let us kill him and throw his body down a well, and say that he has been torn to pieces by a wild beast. Then we shall see what comes of all his dreams!" But one of them, Reuben, who, as the eldest brother, felt his responsibility more than the rest, sprang into the breach. He did not venture, however, to declare outright that he disapproved of the plan altogether, so he had recourse to a stratagem to rescue his brother. "We had better not murder him with our own hands," said he. "We can throw him down this well here in the wilderness, and then he will die without our having killed him." This suggestion was adopted, so when Joseph came up to them they dragged him out of his splendid robe and threw him down a dry well, where he would die of hunger and thirst.

Delighted to have satisfied their vengeance, Joseph's brothers had just sat down to their meal, when they saw a caravan drawing near. It consisted of some Arab merchants, Midianites or Ishmaelites, who were on their way to Egypt with balsam and spices. As soon as he saw them coming Judah cried out "Really, brothers! what is the use of our killing Joseph. Remember he is our own brother after all. Suppose we sell him to these Ishmaelites." The idea was taken up by the rest, and Joseph was soon sold to the merchants for twenty shekkels of silver (twenty-five shillings)—the usual price of a slave.¹ This threw Reuben out of his calculations, and when he came to the well to rescue Joseph and found that he was no longer there he ran in terror to the others and cried out, "The lad is gone! Where shall I hide myself now?" To conceal what they had done Joseph's brothers killed a goat, dipped his splendid coat in its blood and sent it on to their father, while they themselves soon followed, and, pretending to be much horrified, said to him, "We have found this coat. Is it not Joseph's?" Jacob recognised it, and cried out in dismay, "My son's garment! A wild beast has devoured him! Joseph is torn to pieces!" For many days the father sat down in mourning, while his sons and daughters stood round him to console him. But he would not accept any comfort, and kept repeating, "I shall go down mourning to my son to the world below!" Thus was Joseph bewailed by his father.

Meanwhile the merchants had taken him to Egypt and sold him as a slave to Potiphar, the captain of the royal life-guard. But even in the strange country Yahweh did not forsake him, and everything he took in hand turned out so successful that Potiphar, who saw more and more clearly how this Hebrew slave was helped and blessed by his god,

¹ Leviticus xxvii. 5.

gradually intrusted more and more to his care, until at last everything was under his control. Nothing could have been more to Potiphar's advantage. Yahweh blessed him for Joseph's sake. The harvest was a specially good one. The cattle had numbers of young, and were sleek and healthy. The yield of wool and milk was wonderful. The household slaves did their work faithfully. Spinning and weaving were more industriously performed than ever before. The food was beautifully prepared. It seemed as if the handmills themselves had never ground so well before. In a word there was not one single cause for dissatisfaction; and the master of the house had no occasion to look after anything, for Joseph saw to it all. Thus he proved himself to the fullest extent worthy of his master's confidence.

Moreover, he showed himself deserving of this confidence in other respects as well, by resisting a sore temptation. For Potiphar's wife let her eye fall upon the powerful and comely slave, and endeavoured to persuade him to commit adultery with her. Glowing with holy indignation, Joseph answered her in proud and earnest language. "My master," he said, "has entrusted all to me. I am next in rank to himself, and am acquainted with all his affairs. You only must be sacred and inviolable to me, for you are his wife. How should I do such great wickedness, then, and sin against God!" It was of no avail. She would not desist. Day after day Joseph had to reject her vile requests, until at last, thwarted and embittered as she was, she accused him to Potiphar of having attempted to seduce her; and he, believing the accusations of his wife, threw him into prison.

Thus Joseph was once more the victim of others' wickedness. First the son of the shepherd prince had become a slave, and now the trusted and honoured servant was doomed to imprisonment. But even there his god did not forget

him. The prisoner soon won the jailor's confidence. Just as it had been in Potiphar's house, so was it here. Everything that was entrusted to Joseph went on well, so that he was allowed to go about and look after the other prisoners in comparative freedom. Everything that he looked to was looked to well.

When he had been in prison some time a conspiracy was discovered against the king, and the chief butler and the chief baker were thrown into close confinement on suspicion of having attempted to poison Pharaoh. Joseph had charge of them, as he had of the other prisoners, and when he came to them one morning he noticed that they were much disturbed by something, and so asked them, "What ails you? I can see by your faces that something is troubling you." "We have both of us been dreaming," was the reply, "and we cannot tell what our dreams mean, or who can interpret them for us." "Let me hear them," said Joseph, "God can interpret dreams. Only tell me them." Then the butler told his dream. He had found himself standing by a vine-tree with three branches. He had seen it spring up and blossom and form clusters of ripe fruit. He had held the king's cup in his hand, and had squeezed the juice of the grapes into it and presented it to the king. Joseph understood the meaning of the dream at once. "Listen to its interpretation," said he. "The three branches signify three days. At the end of that time you shall once more occupy your former place of honour at the king's court. And then," he added, "when it is well with you, think of me and make mention of me to the king that he may release me from this place. For I have been kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and have done nothing wrong to deserve to be shut up here." Now, when the chief baker heard the favourable interpretation which Joseph had given of his companion's dream he hoped for the same lot himself; but his hopes

were disappointed. For when he had told him how in his dream he had seen himself with three baskets upon his head, the topmost of them full of all kinds of baked food for the king's table, and how this food had all been eaten up by the birds, he heard to his dismay that the three baskets, like the three branches, represented as many days, and that he too should be exalted, as well as the butler, after three days, but exalted in a very different sense; for he should be hanged, and should be a prey to the birds.

What Joseph foretold took place. After three days it was the king's birthday, and he had a feast prepared for all his courtiers. Then he restored the chief butler to his former office, and allowed him once more to hand him his wine-cup, but he had the chief baker hanged. And now the hour for Joseph's release might soon have struck if only the butler had borne him in mind. But he forgot all about him.

The victim of persecution, treachery, and ingratitude on the part of men, Joseph remained in prison. But Yahweh still remembered him. He determined to set him at liberty, and therefore quickened the chief butler's memory. For, two years after what has just been narrated, the king too had a dream. There was not one of all his interpreters who could explain what he had seen. As he stood in his sleep by the bank of the Nile he saw seven oxen rise out of the river. They were fine and fat, and they went quietly grazing in the pastures along the river. Then all at once seven more oxen rose out of it, and these were ugly and lean, so that the king had never seen their like for ugliness, and they went up to the fat ones that came out first and ate them up, all seven of them, but yet they were still as thin as ever themselves. When he had seen this vision the king woke up, but soon to fall asleep again and to dream a second time. This time he saw seven rich heavy ears of corn, growing out of one stem, and then seven lank, thin ears, parched by the east wind,

and these ate up the first. Terrified and disturbed, the king, next morning, summoned all the wise and learned men of Egypt to explain the dreams to him. But they could not do so. Then the past came back before the chief butler's mind, and he said to the king, "My lord, I remember my sin. Two years ago you were angry with me and threw me, together with the chief baker, into prison. Now, once when we both of us had had dreams, there was a Hebrew lad there, a slave of the captain of the life-guard, and when we told him our dreams, not only did he interpret them in a moment, but, what is more, the interpretation proved to be true. For he foretold that I should be restored to honour, and that he would be put to death."

The king sent for Joseph at once. They shaved his head bare, according to the custom of the Egyptians (for they never let their hair grow unless they were in mourning), and gave him a suitable garment for appearing at court. Thus prepared he entered the palace. Then Pharaoh addressed him and said, "I have dreamed a dream, which no one can interpret for me. Now, I have heard that you can interpret every dream as soon as you hear it." "Not so," was the young man's modest answer, "but I trust that God will foretell something acceptable to the king." Then the prince recounted his dreams, and they did not remain uninterpreted. "Your two dreams have but one meaning," said Joseph, "the fat oxen and the full ears signify seven years of plenty, while the lean beasts and lank ears of corn foretell seven years of famine. The famine thus foretold will be so dreadful that the plenty which has gone before will be forgotten, and all Egypt will sink under it. As to the repetition of the dream, it is a proof of the certainty of the prediction that the same truth is declared in two different ways." Having assigned this meaning to the dreams, Joseph added a piece of good advice on the subject. "The king," said he, "should

set some intelligent and competent man over the whole of Egypt, and should have granaries made for him in which to collect one-fifth of the produce of the land during the years of plenty to be saved for the times of want that will follow."

The king was much relieved to understand the meaning of the warning he had received, and was no less pleased with Joseph's sensible advice. The conduct of the latter had made a favourable impression on the courtiers too, and they quite agreed with the king, therefore, that a more suitable person could hardly be found to carry out these extensive plans than Joseph himself. For clearly the spirit of God was in him. So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no wiser man than you, and you shall be the ruler of all the land of Egypt, responsible to no one but me." No sooner had the king uttered these words than he drew his signet ring from off his hand and gave it to the newly-appointed grand vizier. Then he told them to provide him with the royal garb of the priesthood, and to throw a chain of gold round his neck. Immediately after this he received homage. He rode all through the capital, in the second royal chariot, while the heralds that went before him cried to the people "Kneel down! Kneel down!"

This new dignity was matched by a new name, and Joseph received the high-sounding Egyptian title "Saphnat-Panéah," which means, according to some authorities, "deliverer of the world," and according to others "food of the living." Moreover he received Asnat, daughter of Potipherah, priest of On, in marriage.

The prediction was soon fulfilled. There came years of unheard-of plenty. The corn was laid up in the cities by Joseph's orders in amazing quantities, and the harvest was so great that it was no longer possible even to measure the

stores that were gathered together. But after seven years this abundance was followed by scarcity. The crops failed year after year, and the helpless people were directed to Joseph, who now opened his granaries and sold the corn. So all the Egyptians streamed to Joseph to buy bread. Nay, the whole world came to Egypt for provisions, for the famine was universal.

If we read this story straight through it runs pretty smoothly, and we should hardly guess that, like most of the legends of the patriarchs, it is put together from two accounts. So it is, however. Here and there slight contradictions and repetitions betray the joints and fastenings, and show us that the work is not all of one piece. In many points the two traditions differ considerably from each other. According to one, for example, Joseph is sold to some Ishmaelites by his brothers, while the other relates that he was thrown into the well by his brothers, and was found there by some Midianites who were passing by, so that he was really stolen, as he tells the chief butler in prison, from the land of Canaan, which is here described, somewhat prematurely, as the land of the Hebrews. According to one tradition he is imprisoned on the accusation of Potiphar's wife; the other knows nothing of this circumstance, and brings Joseph to the prison not as accused of any crime, but simply as the slave of Potiphar who had charge of the prisoners. If we could separate the two stories accurately we should have mentioned each of them separately. But as that is at present impossible, we have given the narrative as it lies before us in Genesis.

In whatever particulars the two legends about Joseph may have departed from each other, it is evident that they both mention him with honour; but while the one dwells more on his strict morality and especially his chastity, the

other represents him as the man to whom his god revealed his pleasure, especially by means of dreams and the gift of interpreting them. For the whole story hinges upon dreams. Joseph dreams; the butler and the baker dream; and Pharaoh dreams. And it is clear that very great importance is attached to these visions, for they all come out true, and are evidently looked upon as communications from God.

This seems strange to us, who use the word *dream* as the symbol of all that is vain and unreal, but it was not by any means so in ancient times. It was the common belief of all nations that dreams were sent by the gods, and of course, as a necessary consequence, that the art of interpreting them was a science. It is easy to see how this belief came to be held. The dread of everything incomprehensible played an important part in the formation of the religious representations and ideas of the ancients, and it need not surprise us therefore if the mysterious phenomena of dreams, the clearness with which one sometimes sees all kinds of things in one's sleep, the misery or delight one experiences on these occasions, the recollection, sometimes so clear and sometimes so confused, that is left behind,—it need not surprise us, I say, if all this made a deep impression upon people's minds, and was ascribed to the action of a deity.

There is a characteristic passage about dreams and their interpretation in the works of the celebrated Roman author Cicero, which helps us to understand the views of the ancients in the last century before Christ, in a time, that is, when people were beginning to give themselves some account of their beliefs. Cicero attaches great importance to dreams, and says that "what happens to a seer or soothsayer in his waking hours is experienced by ordinary people when asleep. For then, while the body is prostrate and almost dead, the soul is awake, and is free from the influence of the senses, and from all distracting care. Since the soul

has existed from all eternity and has held intercourse with countless numbers of other souls, it sees everything that lies in the nature of things, if only it is not too much disturbed by excess of eating and drinking to be able to keep awake while the body is asleep. Thus it is that the dreamer has power to read the future. The power of interpreting what the dreamer sees is, then, no natural gift, but an artificially acquired power. And so, too, with oracles and predictions. In all these cases the interpreters explain these phenomena just as the grammarians and commentators explain the poets. What use could we make of the metals if we were not taught how to find them? Of what use would timber be to us, but for the carpenter's art? So to every good gift that the gods have given man there is attached an art by which he can make use of it. Inasmuch, then, as there is a great deal that is obscure and ambiguous in dreams, oracles and predictions, we have recourse to the explanations of the interpreters." Such was the argument of a philosopher from whose mind simple unreasoning faith had long vanished. In earlier times no such arguments as these were used, but people believed—without ever for a moment doubting the truth of their belief—in the first place that it was often God's will to reveal the future to man, and in the next place that dreams were amongst the means by which he did so. And thus in Israel, too, the dream, together with the vision of the prophet and the oracle of the priest, was looked upon as a very common means by which Yahweh revealed his will; and the "dreamers" are mentioned by the side of the prophets and the priests.¹ The proverb-writers or "sages" of Israel appear to have attached less importance to dreams, and at any rate to have called in question their value as means of prediction. Thus, in the

¹ Numbers xii. 6; 1 Samuel xxviii. 6, 15; Joel ii. 28; Deuteronomy xiii. 1–5.

latter portion of the book of Job, which was added to it at least a century after the Babylonian captivity,¹ Elihu says:²

God makes himself heard in this wise
 And in that wise ; but men mark it not.
 In dreams and in visions of the night,
 When a deep sleep falls upon men
 And they slumber tranquilly on their beds ;
 Then he opens the ear of man
 And stamps the seal on his exhortations,
 To hold him back from the deed of horror,
 And to estrange him from pride ;
 To deliver his soul from the grave
 And his life from the arrows of death.

Here then, as in another passage,³ a dream is said to be sent by God, but only as an exhortation to men. Later sages deny the predictive value of dreams still more emphatically. One treats them as parallel with "vanities,"⁴ and another says straight out:⁵

Vain and deceitful hopes befit the senseless man,
 And dreams make fools rejoice.
 Like one who grasps at a shadow and chases the wind,
 Is he who puts trust in dreams.
 A dream is a reflection of something that is,
 The reflex of face against face.
 How then can the clean come out of the unclean ?
 Or truth out of a lie ?
 Oracles and soothsaying and dreams are deceit,
 Mere imaginings of the heart, as of one racked by pain.
 Then if dreams are not sent by the High One,
 Set not thy heart upon them in trouble.
 Dreams have led many astray e'er now,
 And they that trusted to them have fallen.

At the very time, however, when this Israelite was denying, with such quiet good sense, that dreams had any value, the old superstition still lived in undiminished strength in

¹ See vol. iv., chapter xiv.

² Job xxxiii. 14—18.

³ Job iv. 12 ff.

⁴ Ecclesiastes v. 7.

⁵ Jesus son of Sirac xxxiv. 1—7.

the minds of the masses ; and the art of interpreting dreams, together with its character as a gift of God, was glorified in the person of Daniel.¹

At the time when the stories about Joseph were written, no doubts had yet risen as to the divine origin of dreams, and there was no difficulty, therefore, in sketching the ancestor of Ephraim and Manasseh as a man who enjoyed, by God's favour, the privilege of having prophetic dreams himself, and being able to interpret those of others.

Joseph is described as the favoured of Yahweh ; and in the next chapter we shall consider the connection between this fact and the moral excellence which is ascribed to him. We will close this chapter by citing an Israelite song, which shows how much importance was attached to the favour of Yahweh by his worshippers : ²

Preserve me, O God ! for I trust in thee
I say to Yahweh "Thou art my lord,
My bliss can be found in thee alone."

Yahweh is my heritage and my cup ;
Thou holdest my lot in thy hand.
Lovely places have been given to me,
And my heritage is fair in my eyes.
I will praise Yahweh, for he gives me counsel,
And my heart teaches me by night.
I set Yahweh ever before my mind,
For if he stands beside me I shall not be shaken.
Therefore my heart rejoices,
Therefore my soul is glad,
And my body shall dwell in safety.
For thou wilt not surrender my soul to the shadow-land,³
Nor suffer thy favoured one to look on the pit,
Thou wilt teach me the way to abide in life.
Joy is before thy face,
Beauty in thy right hand, for ever.

¹ See vol. iv., chapter xxii.

² Psalm xvi.

³ After an amended version.

CHAPTER XXVII.

JOSEPH, THE LORD OF HIS BROTHERS.

GEN. XLII. — XLV.

CANAAN,—so the story goes on—like every other country, felt the effects of the famine that Joseph had foretold; and Jacob and his family soon began to be in want. They were already reduced to great distress when the father said to his sons, “Why do you look at each other in that helpless way? See, they tell me that corn is to be had in Egypt. So go there and lay in provisions to keep us alive.” Joseph’s brothers attended to their father’s sensible advice, and all the ten of them set out for Egypt. But Jacob would not let Benjamin accompany them, for fear some accident should befall him on the journey.

So once on a time, when Joseph was busy selling corn, and people from all quarters of the world came before him, his own brothers appeared amid the crowd and bowed down in reverence before him as the governor of the land. Now, though they did not recognise him, he knew who they were at once, and all the past rushed into his mind. So now his dreams had come true, and his brothers were bowing down before him! What sufferings they had brought upon him because of these dreams! They deserved a heavy punishment; and though he had no intention of dealing with them after their deserts, yet they must not be allowed to escape entirely unchastised. They must be made to feel that sin never goes unpunished. So he met them with the words, “You are spies! You have come to see at what point the country is open to attack.” His brothers answered in dismay, “No! no! We are all sons of the same father; honourable men and no spies.” “I don’t believe you,” he replied. “You are come to see where the frontier is ex-

posed." "No! my Lord," answered they, repeating their first assertion at greater length. "There were twelve of us once, but the youngest has staid at home with our father, in the land of Canaan, and one is no more." But Joseph put an end to all contradiction by saying, "I don't believe a word that you have said, but we must find out the truth of the matter. Send one of your number home, while the rest stay here as prisoners, and have your youngest brother brought here. Unless what you have said is true then as sure as Pharaoh lives you shall be treated as spies." So he kept them three days in prison, and then sent for them and said, "Listen to me. I am a God-fearing man, and will not act unreasonably. Let one of you remain here, while all the rest go back with provisions for your family, and then come here again with your youngest brother."

Then Joseph's brothers said to each other in their misery, "We have deserved it all! For did we not see our brother's anguish when he begged us for mercy without being moved by it. It is for his sake that this misery has come upon us." And Reuben said to them, "I told you not to injure the lad, but you would not listen to me. Now his blood is required at our hands." So they spoke amongst themselves, not knowing that Joseph could understand them; for he kept up his Egyptian character well, and always spoke with them through an interpreter. But now he could hardly contain himself, and hurried away from the hall to weep aloud. As soon as he had recovered his self-command he returned to see his sentence carried out. One of his brothers must remain behind. He spared Reuben because he knew that he was guiltless, but Simeon, the second brother, was put into fetters in the presence of the others, and led away as a hostage.

By Joseph's orders his brothers' corn-sacks were now filled with grain, and their money was secretly put in at the

top, besides which they had provisions for their journey given them. Now, as they were going home one of them opened his sack at an inn to get out some food for his beast, and there, to his great surprise, he found his money. This mystery filled them all with fear. "What has God done to us now!" they cried in amazement.

So they came back to Jacob, and told him all that had happened; and when each one of them found his money in his sack they and their father were again greatly disturbed. Jacob, in despair at the dreadful demand of the Egyptian ruler, cried out:—"How you are robbing me! Joseph is not; Simeon is not; and now you will take Benjamin away from me too! Everything goes against me!" Reuben now showed once more that he was worthy of his position as the eldest of the brothers, for he came forward and offered his two sons as surety. He gave his father leave to kill them if he failed to bring Benjamin back alive. It is true that his father would not have gained much by doing so, but the offer, which is quite in the spirit of the age, at any rate showed how thoroughly he was in earnest when he said: "Trust him to me; I will take care of him." But Jacob would not be persuaded, and refused to let Benjamin go. Now that Joseph was dead, was not he the only child of his beloved Rachel that was left? If any accident happened to him on the way, his gray hairs would go down in sorrow to the world below.

But after a time they were pressed by want. The corn was all used up, and Jacob himself urged his sons to go to Egypt to get some more food. But they objected to going unless they might take Benjamin with them; and indeed roundly refused to do so, as well they might, for it would have been certain death! Jacob, whom his agony of mind made utterly unreasonable, exclaimed, "What business had you to tell that man that you had another brother at home

at all?" "He asked us about our father," said they, "whether he was still living, and whether we had another brother. How were we to know that he would say, Bring him here?" Then Judah took the lead in pressing his father and urging him to consent. "I will go surety for him," he said; "you may claim him back from me. If I fail to bring him back safe and sound you may hold me responsible all my life, and may do what you like to me! Only give your consent, to keep us and our children alive. If we had not wasted so much time we might have been there and back twice over by now."

Thus persuaded, Jacob at last gave way, "If it cannot be helped, then, so be it," he said. "Take presents of the most precious products of the country with you, as a token of respect for this man, and double money, so as to be able to return what you found in your sacks. Perhaps it was an oversight." And then he added, with a sigh, "Take your brother with you, then, and go back to this man, and God Almighty give you grace in his eyes, so that he may let Simeon and Benjamin come back. As for me, if I must be left utterly childless, I cannot help it!" Joseph's brothers started upon their journey at once, and reached the capital of Egypt in safety.

Then they stood once more in the presence of Joseph; and when he saw them again and recognised Benjamin in the midst of them, he ordered his steward to take them to his house, and to make everything ready there for them to take their evening meal with him. But Jacob's sons had been made suspicious (and no wonder) by all the disagreeable and mysterious adventures they had met with in the foreign land; and they were afraid, therefore, that some trap was being laid for them. "Ah, sir!" they said to their guide, "last time we were here our money came back again, we know not how, into our sacks, but we have brought it with

us now." But they were set at peace at once on this point, for the Egyptian told them that he knew nothing about it except that he had received their money. "No doubt your god and the god of your fathers made you find a treasure in this way in your sacks," he said.

Reassured to some extent, they went into the palace, and there they were soon joined by Simeon. They thought it a good sign that they were politely received, that some slaves came to wash their feet, and that their beasts were provided with fodder; and they spread out their presents and awaited the vice-roy of Egypt with greatly decreased anxiety. When he came he graciously accepted the tokens of their respect, and asked them in a friendly manner, "How do you fare? And the aged father of whom you spoke, how is he? Is he still alive?" "He still lives," they answered, prostrating themselves on the earth again, "and we all are well." So far Joseph had easily restrained his feelings; but when he looked at Benjamin, the son of his own mother, he could hardly utter the words, "Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke? God bless you, my son." Then he hurried away to another chamber and found relief in tears; and after he had washed himself, to remove every trace of his emotion, he came back again and ordered them to prepare the meal.

Here was fresh matter to excite the wonder of Jacob's sons. For while a separate table was spread for them (since an Egyptian might not eat at the same table with foreigners, especially shepherds, such as these Hebrews were) they were all arranged in the order of their ages. Was it an accident, or did this man know their ages? He seemed to feel himself especially drawn towards Benjamin; for though they all had dishes sent to them from his table, yet Benjamin's share was always five times as large as that of any of the others, which was a great sign of favour. For the rest, their recep-

tion left nothing to be desired, and they drank—even to excess—with their host, and forgot all their cares.

Next morning they set out on their journey in good spirits. But what a mysterious country this Egypt was! What was the meaning of all that had befallen them, and what possessed this vice-roy? They could not make it out, but “all’s well that ends well,” and the brothers, all eleven of them, went on their homeward way, carrying their corn with them. With all the greater weight did the blow dealt them by Joseph now fall upon them! He had ordered not only that their money should be hidden in their sacks once more, but that his own silver cup as well should be placed in that of Benjamin. Now they had not gone far on their way before they were overtaken by a band of horsemen, headed by the very man who had conducted them to Joseph’s palace. They are accused, with bitter reproaches, of having stolen the cup from which their host is in the habit of drinking and of divining the future. In vain they protest that they are innocent. A thorough search must be made. So be it then; and let him in whose possession the cup is found be the Egyptian’s slave! But however certain that none of them has stolen the cup, they feel uneasy enough, for so many strange things have happened to them. Reuben’s sack is examined first. There lies the money in its mouth again, but no cup! The same with Simeon, with Levi, with Judah, and so on all through, till at last they come to Benjamin’s sack, and there—oh horror!—by the money in the sack’s mouth lies . . . the cup! They stand aghast. They tear their clothes. Before long they have put the corn upon the beasts again, and are all on their way back to the city.

Once more they stand before the Egyptian ruler, in that same house in which they had feasted with him the day before. They fall to the ground, with Judah at their head,

but are met with the reproachful words, "What have you been doing? Did you not know that such a man as I am would discover your guilt?" Then Judah came forward as the representative of them all, and said, "What are we to say to my lord? We have nothing to bring forward in our defence. God is bringing your servants' trespass home to them. See, we are your slaves, all of us, just as much as he in whose possession the cup was found." "Not at all," was the reply. "I have no wish for that. The one in whose possession this cup was found must remain here as my slave, but the rest of you may go back in peace to your father." Then Judah spoke once more in the agony of his soul, and said, "Oh, sir, listen to my words, and be not angry; for you are as great as Pharaoh. When first we came here you asked us whether we still had a father or another brother, and we answered that we could still rejoice in the life of our aged father, and that we had one more brother, still young, born to him in his old age, and that his only whole brother was dead, so that his father loved him more than us all. And then you asked us to bring him with us because you wished to see him, and though we stoutly declared that it could not be, because he was so young that he would die if he were parted from his father, yet you drove us to compliance by threatening that you would never let us come into your sight again without him. So when our father urged us to come here again to buy corn, and we insisted on taking the boy with us, he reminded us, weeping, of all that had taken place, how he had only had two sons by the mother of this boy, and how the elder had disappeared in such a way that he could not choose but think he had been torn to pieces, and he told us that it would be the death of him if the boy perished on the way. So if we go home without him, we shall make our grey-headed father go down with sorrow to the world below. And now, my lord, I have gone

surety for him. Let me stay, then, instead of him, and let him go back with my brothers ; for how could I ever go into my father's presence if the boy were no longer with us ? I could not bear to look upon the anguish which would seize him."

Joseph could now hold out no longer. He hastily ordered his retinue to retire, and almost before they were alone he burst into tears and cried, "I am Joseph ! Is my father yet alive ?" His brothers stood rivetted to the ground, and could not believe their ears. When they had all recovered themselves a little, Joseph made them come nearer and said : "I am indeed your brother, whom you sold as a slave to Egypt ; but now do not mourn or be disturbed about that any more, for God sent me before you, as it were, to deliver you from the famine. Besides the two years that have gone there are still five years of famine coming, and God has led me here to protect you from dying of starvation, for you are to grow into a great nation. So it was not you, but God, that sent me here. He has made me the king's adviser, and the ruler over all his possessions and the governor of the whole of Egypt. Go then to our father with all speed and invite him in my name to come here and settle with all his belongings in the land of Goshen, near to me, and I will maintain him there for the five coming years. Surely none of you doubt that I am really he ? Benjamin, my brother ! surely you remember me ? Tell my father, then, what honour I have come to in this land, and bring him here with all speed." Then Joseph fell upon Benjamin's neck and kissed him, and Benjamin wept as he embraced him. He greeted with kisses and with tears the rest of his brothers too ; until at last they found words again in which to speak to him.

Meanwhile the king had been informed of everything. The very fact that as soon as Joseph was left alone with

these Hebrews he began to weep had excited attention in itself; and it soon became known that they were his brothers. The king confirmed the arrangements made by Joseph for his father's migration, and gave his brothers vehicles for their wives and children and provisions for the journey, telling them that they need not trouble themselves about the furniture, but might leave it behind them without any anxiety, as they should have full command of the wealth of Egypt.

When Joseph took leave of his brothers he gave them each a complete suit of festal garments, presented Benjamin with a large sum of money and five robes of state, and sent his father ten asses laden with precious Egyptian wares and ten she asses laden with necessities of life.

Now, when Jacob's sons came back to their father and said to him "Joseph is still alive and is governor of the whole of Egypt," he was utterly amazed and could not believe it was true. But when they had told him all Joseph's words, and when he had seen the chariots that he had sent him, he came to himself again, and his overflowing heart found relief in the joyful cry, "It is too much! Joseph, my son, still living! Let me go and see him before I die!"

The story of Joseph often reminds us of a telling drama or a thrilling romance. For it works powerfully upon the feelings, and has a certain fascination throughout, while its life and movement keep the attention constantly fixed, and an unexpected and happy conclusion brings the story to an end. The pleasure that children take in listening to it shows the skill of the authors. I speak of *authors* (in the plural) because this portion, like what has gone before, is put together from the work of two writers. But if once children's feelings are worked upon so that they can live with the heroes of a story, or, still better, so that they can cry with them too, they let many defects pass unnoticed, and

are not at all troubled by improbabilities or even impossibilities. Nay, still worse, even their moral perceptions are sometimes lulled to sleep when their imagination is taken captive by a telling and fascinating story. Both these facts are strikingly exemplified in the favourable reception given by children to the story of Joseph.

No thoughtful person can long remain in doubt as to the historical or unhistorical character of what is here related. For we cannot possibly look upon a story as historical when sundry dreams, regarded as divine revelations, appear in it, and its development hinges to a large extent upon these dreams and their fulfilment. But we have spoken of this already. Now let us examine the portion of the narrative that we have dealt with in this chapter. The representation here given is impossibility itself.

Only think for a moment of these points.

The famine was foretold seven years before it began, and during the whole interval the king did everything that could be done to lighten the misery that was to come. Yet no one else in Egypt or elsewhere appears to have taken any precautions, though there was nothing to prevent everyone's knowing all about it. Moreover, the whole world suffers from the famine, and is obliged to go to Egypt for corn. This is necessarily involved in the story; for why else should Jacob's sons have chosen Egypt for their second as well as their first purchase of corn? Is such a state of things credible in real life? Again, Jacob sends ten of his sons, each with his own ass, to buy corn. One cannot help asking why he did not send one son at the head of a caravan? What little provision was laid in in this way, however, cannot have gone far towards supporting the whole family, especially if, as we are told, part of it had to be used as fodder for the beasts on the way. And yet the story tells us distinctly that each one of Jacob's sons took his own sack

with him upon his own ass ; else how could it be said that the cup was hidden, and afterwards found, in Benjamin's special sack ? In Egypt things are managed after a somewhat homely fashion. Joseph sells corn to all the world in person. This is almost impossible to imagine, but it is distinctly the meaning of the story ; for if Jacob's sons could have managed to obtain corn from anyone else, they would certainly have done so on their second journey, since it was not to obtain Simeon's release, but simply to escape dying of hunger, that they returned to Egypt and came once more into Joseph's presence. It would appear from the story that there were no merchants in Egypt, and that no creature could carry corn to Canaan without buying it from the viceroy in person. Finally, as already observed in another connection,¹ the representation of Benjamin as a boy whose life would be in danger if he were separated from his father, hardly agrees with another piece of information according to which he was at this very time the father of ten sons.

It would hardly be worth while to stay to inquire expressly whether Joseph's conduct will bear testing, had not his character often been described as noble, and even as one of the most exalted to be found in the Old Testament. But since our moral perception may easily suffer from such perverted judgments, we must enter an emphatic protest against this excessive praise of him. Joseph as a boy, repeating a dream in which his own exaltation is foretold, twice over, and telling his father tales about his brothers, is surely no one's ideal ; but the brutal chastisement inflicted on him by his brothers seems at least to have had the effect of taking down his conceit. At any rate, when in Egypt he is the model of a faithful and pious slave, and his answer to Potiphar's wife—"How should I do such wickedness and sin against God ?"—is full of nobility and earnestness. But

¹ See p. 132.

his conduct towards his brothers, which is the main point after all, is anything but generous, and shows that he took an unfeeling and spiteful pleasure in annoying them. He conceals the fact that he recognises them at once, and knowingly and purposely brings a false accusation against them ; he puts them in prison three days—keeps Simeon back—compels his brother Benjamin, whom he is said to have loved tenderly, to undertake a journey which his father fears may be fatal to him—disturbs and alarms his brothers on two occasions by means of the money which they find mysteriously returned into their sacks—relieves them from their anxiety by his friendly reception, only to make them still more uneasy about the cup that is found in Benjamin's sack of corn—and, most inexcusable of all, entirely overlooks the great and bitter sorrow that his conduct inflicts upon his grey-headed father. In the story it all turns out well, but, supposing it to be true, “more by good luck than good conduct.”

Though the writers intended their Joseph for a sketch of a model son and brother, they have not been successful. Joseph certainly seems very tender hearted, and weeps when he sees his brothers on the first occasion, and again when he meets Benjamin afterwards ; but for all that he is hard hearted enough systematically in cold blood to punish them for the suffering they inflicted on him. It is sometimes thought that his conduct may be defended by supposing that his object was to see whether his brothers would behave any better towards Benjamin than they had done towards himself ; but we must remember, in the first place, that no such object is hinted at by a single word in the story ; and, in the second place, that it does not make out a better case for Joseph after all. Has a man a right to test his neighbour's disposition by putting him to the torture ? Is that unassuming and amiable conduct ? Surely not.

There is one point in the story which is only a minor feature, but which must not be overlooked in forming an estimate of Joseph's person. We are told of a divining cup used by him. The kind of divination here indicated was known to various peoples of antiquity, and was conducted as follows:—Little bits of gold or silver were thrown into a cup full of water, and sometimes precious stones, with certain characters carved upon them, were added. From the figures found in the water, by the reflection of these objects, those skilled in the art made out the future. Others did something the same with melted wax, and read the events of the future from the combinations of the little pieces. This kind of divination was well known in Egypt, and apparently in Israel too; for the writer of the legend of Joseph finds it quite unnecessary to explain the nature of the cup to his readers, nor does he utter a single word of disapproval of its use. Indeed, any such disapprobation was not in the spirit of his age. We shall presently have occasion to notice more than once, that though sorcery was opposed by some of the most advanced Israelites, until at last it was forbidden in the Law, yet the sorcerers, wizards, and necromancers played a great part in the national life of Israel, by the side of the seers, dreamers, priests, and prophets. The prophets especially were given to meddling with these arts. In our story, this trait in Joseph's character agrees very well with his power of reading the future in his dreams and interpreting the visions of others.

Nothing is further from the intention of the writers, however, than to cast a slur upon Joseph's character. On the contrary, they desired to give him the place of honour and to sketch him as ruling over his brothers and as rescuing Egypt, or rather all the world. But in pursuing this object they make the extraordinary favour with which he was regarded by Yahweh far more conspicuous than any nobility

or exaltation of his own character. For instance, when we are told that Potiphar's house was blessed for Joseph's sake we think of the natural consequence of the industry and care of a faithful servant making order and prosperity supreme in Potiphar's house and lands. But the writer does not tell us this, and, indeed, he did not mean it. He calls Joseph "a man in whose hands everything succeeded because Yahweh helped him, and whom Potiphar set over all he had because he saw that Yahweh was with him."¹ In the same way Joseph becomes lord of Egypt, and saves his brothers from the famine, because his god had willed it so.² Now, when we speak of God's blessing and God's help we think especially of the blissful fruits of virtue and faith; but this divine blessing was not connected with piety in the same way to the mind of the ancient Israelites. Yahweh had his favourites and they were blessed in consequence of the protection of their god, while those whom he hated he blinded and tempted to folly, and so brought to destruction. They would say, "he who is blessed by Yahweh acts wisely and well" rather than "he who acts wisely and well is blessed by Yahweh."

In this they were at one with all antiquity, as we can easily understand, for the ancient conception of the character of the deity, as we have already seen repeatedly, was that of a nature-god. In the sun, the wind, the rain, the thunder-storm, and other favourable or destructive phenomena of nature, the ancients saw the hand of the gods. And so they ascribed no righteousness to their gods, for the sun never troubles himself about the virtue or vice of man, and the lightning strikes good and bad without distinction. They had no difficulty, therefore, in regarding their gods as capricious. They were wise,—but their wisdom was that of the

¹ Genesis xxxix. 2—6.

² Genesis xlv. 8.

power that no one could resist; they dealt according to right—but their right was might.

Yea truly I know that it is so :
How should a man be held just before God ?
If he sees good to contend with him,
He cannot answer him one to a thousand.
Wise of heart as he is and fearful in might,
Who has opposed him and has not suffered ?
Who removes the mountains before they know it,
And in his wrath overthrows them. &c.

The poem from which these lines are taken¹ dates from a period at which a more exalted idea of the nature of God had already found a place in many minds by the side of the old one, yet here, and all through the poem, the strongest proof of God's justice is his omnipotence.

Among the prophets of the eighth century before Christ² there was a living conviction that Yahweh was a righteous god who rewarded the good and punished the wicked, and thus the way was prepared for the recognition of the truth that the real happiness of men depends on conditions of their inner life. But the leaven of the old nature-worship could not be expelled at once, and prosperity and adversity were still looked upon as tokens of the favour or the displeasure of God. But since prosperity does not fall to the lot of the virtuous alone, nor disaster to that of the wicked, the want of agreement between goodness and prosperity always remained a source of painful doubt; and piety was thought to consist chiefly in the confident belief that Yahweh would really give what was good to those whom he loved. This belief, as we shall presently see, more than once decided the practical line of action taken by the people, and we find utterance given to it in some of the most beautiful of the psalms of the Israelites. We may close this chapter with one of them.³

¹ Job ix. 2—5.

² See p. 29.

³ Psalm xci.

Blessed is he who abides under the protection of the Most High,
Who passes the night in the shadow of the Almighty,
Who says to Yahweh, "My refuge and fortress,
The god upon whom I trust!"
For he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler,
And from the terrible pestilence;
With his pinions shall he cover thee,
And under his wings shalt thou find a refuge,
His faith is a shield and an armour.
Thou shalt not fear for the terror by night,
Nor for the arrow that flieth by day:
Nor for the pestilence creeping round in the darkness,
Nor the plague that wasteth at noonday.
At thy side shall a thousand fall,
Ten thousand at thy right hand,
But it shall not come to thee.
But thou shalt see with thine eyes
And behold the reward of the wicked.
Because thou hast called Yahweh thy refuge,
And hast made the Most High thy dwelling,
Evil shall not come nigh unto thee,
Nor disaster draw near thy tent.
For he shall give his angels charge over thee
To protect thee in all thy ways.
They shall bear thee up in their hands,
That thou dash not thy foot on a stone.
Thou shalt tread on the roaring beast and the adder,
And trample upon the lion and dragon.
Because he trusts in me I will deliver him,
I will exalt him, because he knows my name.
When he calls upon me I will answer him,
In time of need I will be with him.
I will deliver him and will give him honour.
I will lengthen his life till he be satisfied,
And will make him to see my salvation.

These verses require little or no explanation. In the last few lines it appears that Yahweh is introduced as speaking. One word, however, on lines ten and eleven, in which mention is made of a terror by night and an arrow that flies by day. The meaning of the arrow is obvious. It is the symbol of a sunbeam, to the influence of which the origin of the

pestilence was attributed in ancient times. The "terror by night," therefore, is some other cause of sickness that was supposed to be active at night. The idea contained in these lines, therefore, is exactly the same as that of the two next. This is very common in Hebrew poems; for they seldom or never have any measure or rhyme, but are distinguished from prose, in outward form, by the repetition of the same thought in different words two or three times in succession. This may well seem strange to us, for we are accustomed to rhyme and rhythm, or at any rate the latter, in all our verses. Yet neither the one nor the other is by any means inseparable from poetical language. The peculiarity of poetry is that in it a man who is inspired by some passion, whether noble or the reverse, gives expression to his feelings; and the more artificial the form in which he does so the smaller the chance of the substance being really poetical. But when a man, in a highly-wrought frame of mind, is driven by pressure from within to utter what is going on in his heart and to pour out his soul in words, nothing is more natural than for him to repeat the same thing in different forms two or even three times over; for passion never stints its words. This repetition by which the second member of a sentence fills in the first, even a third being sometimes added, is called "parallelism." In the poem just quoted almost every couplet or triplet is an example of what has been said.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JACOB IN EGYPT.

GEN. XLVI.—L.

THE arrival of Jacob, or Israel, in Egypt—his settlement in the land of Goshen—his adoption of Joseph's sons as his own, immediately before his death—his burial in the land of Canaan—Joseph's continued protection of his

brothers and all their belongings after his father's death, till he himself paid the last debt of nature—such are the events recorded in the remaining chapters of Genesis. The narrative is not very interesting, and it is easy to see why; for it is put together from various sources—at least three narrators, who agree with each other in the main points, but are here and there at variance, having had a hand in it. This has naturally given rise to repetitions and confusions. We will first run over the narrative as briefly as possible, and then dwell upon one or two special points.

Jacob departed with all speed for Egypt. As he passed through Beersheba, on his way, he made an offering to the god of his father Isaac, who had always lived there; and in a vision by night he received a renewed assurance of God's protection. His heavenly guide would be with him in Egypt too, and Joseph should close his eyes. The company now migrating to Egypt, seventy in number, reached Goshen without interruption, and there Joseph, informed of the arrival of his kinsmen by Judah, who had gone on before them, came in his chariot to meet them. "Now that I have seen you once again, I can die in peace!" cried his father, overcome with joy.

Joseph promised his kinsmen that he would tell the king that they had come, and advised them, when questioned by him as to their occupation, to tell him at once that they were shepherds, and therefore wished to live in the land of Goshen. For the disgust in which the Egyptians held all shepherds and goatherds made it desirable that they should settle in some border district, the population of which was not pure Egyptian, and was rather more accustomed to intercourse with strangers. Five of Joseph's brothers waited on the king, who heard them graciously and granted their request. Jacob, too, was brought into his presence, and blessed him with a patriarch's authority. When questioned by the

king as to his age, he answered that he was a hundred and thirty, but he could not help adding a remark that showed no great contentment with his lot, namely, that his ancestors had reached a much greater age, and that his life had been full of trouble.

An enviable lot was that of Israel's sons in the land of Goshen, or Ramses. For, during the continued famine in Egypt, they were supported by Joseph, while the native Egyptians were compelled to make heavier and heavier sacrifices to keep themselves and their families alive. In the very first year of the famine the Egyptians spent all their money and even gave up their cattle in exchange for the necessities of life; and in the second year they sold themselves and their land to the king. Thus the prince became absolute master of the whole of Egypt. He made ample use of his power, and commanded that thenceforth a tax of one-fifth of the produce of the land should flow into the royal coffers. The priests alone kept possession of their land, for they had a sufficient supply of food given them for nothing.

The Israelites meanwhile had greatly increased in numbers. Seventeen years after his removal to Egypt Jacob felt that his end was drawing near. He died in Joseph's arms, after having made all necessary dispositions as to his own burial and the future of his sons. Joseph commanded his servants, the physicians, to embalm his father's body in the most costly manner. This preparation occupied forty days, after which the Egyptians went into public mourning for seventy days for the father of their vice-roy. Then Joseph, who could not appear before the king in person while still in mourning, asked leave through his courtiers to go and bury his father in his own grave in Canaan, as he himself had wished. As soon as he had received permission, he went with all his father's sons and grandsons and a great host of Egyptians to Canaan. At a certain place

called "the plain of thorns," on the other side of the Jordan, they stayed their course and spent a week in lamentations, from which circumstance the place was afterwards called by the inhabitants Abel-mizraim, that is *lamentation of Egypt*. Then Jacob was buried by his sons.

Now that their father was dead Joseph's brothers began to fear that he would pay them back for their evil deeds of long ago, so they said to him in the greatest anxiety: "Our father told us, before he died, to implore you to forgive the sins of your brothers, the worshippers of your father's god." On hearing these words Joseph burst into tears, and said, as they fell at his feet with every sign of absolute submission, "Fear nothing! Am I in the place of God? Though you plotted evil against me, yet God has turned it to good, to rescue a great people, as has actually come to pass. You have nothing to fear. I shall preserve your lives and the lives of your little children." With such words he comforted them.

Joseph lived to a hundred and ten and saw his grandchildren's children. When he felt that his end was drawing near, he called his kinsmen to him and made them swear that when their god brought them back to the land that he had promised to their fathers, they would take his bones there with them. In order to be able to fulfil this promise they embalmed his body and kept it in Egypt.

In the account just given we have barely mentioned the dispositions made by Jacob on behalf of his sons; but in the original narrative they occupy two whole chapters. Three times we read of prophetic blessings pronounced by the patriarch on all his sons or on Joseph's children, and these accounts are derived from three different writers.

According to one of them, as Jacob lay on his death-bed he called his sons to his side to foretell their future lot

to them. A poem is put into his mouth¹ on this occasion in which he speaks of all the twelve sons. Some of them, however, receive but a very short and uninteresting sentence. Thus Zebulon is informed that he will live by the sea-shore, and Dan that he will rule his tribe just like one of his brothers. So too Gad, Asher, Napthali and Benjamin have each to be content with a single line. Far more bitter was the lot of others, who received a curse instead of a blessing. Thus Reuben is degraded from his place as first-born, Levi and Simeon are told that they will be scattered up and down in Israel, and Issachar must hear the prophecy that he will become tributary to strangers. But the patriarch dwells longer upon Judah and Joseph, and pours out a profusion of blessings upon their heads. We have already observed, in another connection,² that under the form of a prophecy by Jacob as to the future of his sons, the actual condition of the Israelite tribes is celebrated in this poem, which takes us into the period of the Judges, or still later.

It should be noticed that in this poem Joseph still appears as a tribe, by the side of the rest. It is otherwise in the account of the last days of Jacob given by the Book of Origins. There we are told³ that when Joseph visited Jacob on his death-bed, his father told him how God Almighty had appeared to him in Luz and had promised him a numerous posterity and the possession of Canaan. "And now," continued the patriarch, "your two sons, who were born before I came to Egypt, I adopt as my own. Ephraim and Manasseh shall take rank with Reuben and Simeon. If you have other children they shall be counted yours, but their descendants shall be assigned to the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh." This legend places us in a period at which each of these two tribes was (or had been) as powerful as any of the rest, nay stronger than several of their brethren ;

¹ Genesis xlix.

² See p. 131.

³ Genesis xlviii. 3—6.

and it agrees with a representation, to be found in the book of Joshua, of the manner in which the land of Canaan was divided amongst the tribes. We shall deal with this matter presently.

There is another account¹ older than that of the Book of Origins, according to which Jacob, feeble and almost blind, received a visit on his deathbed from Joseph and his two sons. "Who are those?" asked the patriarch, pointing to the two boys. "The children whom God has given me," was the reply. "Let me bless them!" said Jacob. Deeply moved, he kissed and embraced them, and said to Joseph: "See, I long despaired of ever seeing you yourself again, and now I see your children too!" Joseph removed the boys from their place between their grandfather's knees, and bowed down to the earth in reverence. Then he led his sons to his father again, and placed them so that when the old man stretched out his hands he would naturally lay his right hand on the head of the elder, Manasseh, and his left on the younger, Ephraim. But when Jacob stretched out his hands he crossed them, and so laid his right hand on Ephraim's head. He did so, not by mistake but on purpose; for when Joseph wished to alter the position of his hands he would not allow it. "No, my son!" said the old man, "I know well enough what I am doing. Manasseh, too, shall be the father of a great tribe, but his younger brother shall be mightier than he." Then he blessed them with the words: "May you be such an example of prosperity that the richest blessing in Israel may run: God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh!" Thus did he place Ephraim above Manasseh. This is the chief object of the story, and it takes us to a time when the tribe of Manasseh, that had been the mightiest in North Israel at first, was overshadowed by that of the Ephraimites.

¹ Genesis xlviii. 8—22.

We see from several slight traits in these stories that all the writers quite lose sight of the patriarchs as individuals, and only think of the tribes themselves. Thus Joseph's sons, who are spoken of as "lads," stand between their grandfather's knees, and he blesses them. Yet they were born before Jacob came into Egypt, and he had spent seventeen years in that country before he died. The same forgetfulness of the fact that time never stands still, and that little children grow big, is shown by the writer who makes Joseph still his brothers' anxiety after Jacob's death by the words: "Fear not; I will take care of you and your little children."¹ The remarks made on a previous occasion² apply to the whole of the story of Joseph. The representation made to us is not that of a number of tribes migrating to Egypt, but that of a family, consisting of a father and eleven sons, with their wives and children—seventy souls; a family which, leaving the furniture behind, could move to Egypt in a few waggons sent for the purpose by the king.³ A childlike and homely representation, but one that is quite at variance with history.

We must touch upon one more detail, and then we will pass on to an examination of the country to which Jacob and his family had come. The Book of Origins, the writer of which, as we have seen,⁴ took a great interest in the cave of Machpelah, tells us at full length here too how Jacob himself was buried there.⁵ It may be doubted, however, whether this statement agrees with the oldest tradition about Jacob's last resting place. For Joseph sends word to the king that his father wishes to be laid in the grave that he himself had made,⁶ and this cannot refer to the cave of Machpelah, which Abraham had bought from the Hethites. Now, between the

¹ Genesis i. 21.² See p. 132.³ Genesis xlv. 5.⁴ See pp. 197, 198.⁵ Genesis xlix. 29–32, i. 12, 13.⁶ Genesis i. 5.

two accounts of the blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh,¹ the following sentence² is very oddly inserted: "When I came from Padan Aram, Rachel died in the land of Canaan, while I was still some way from Ephrath; and I buried her there."³ This verse is out of place, and probably belongs to the account of Jacob's last wishes,⁴ which, with this addition, would run: "Bury me not in Egypt, but take my body hence, and lay it in the grave that I have made; for, when I came from Padan Aram, Rachel died near Ephrath, and I buried her there." Then Joseph answered: "I will do as you desire." If this conjecture is well founded, then, according to the oldest account, Rachel's grave, south of Bethel,⁵ was Jacob's grave as well. The writer of the Book of Origins thought it more suitable, in some way, that Jacob should be buried at Hebron, and accordingly said that he was.

This story draws our attention to Egypt, for it gives us several pieces of information, which are not without interest, about the condition of that country. In the first place, that all shepherds and goatherds were an abomination to the Egyptians, so that Joseph, the Egyptian, could not eat at the same table with the Hebrews, and the sons of Israel had to live in a border district. In the next place, that the king was the absolute master of the land, and that all its inhabitants were his slaves,⁶ while the fifth part of the harvest fell to his share, except in the case of land belonging to the priests. The story gives us an explanation of this state of things which, if true, makes the defence of Joseph's conduct a hopeless task. For the king must have got all the corn by which he supported Egypt and "all the world" for seven years, either for

¹ Genesis xlviii. 3—6 and 8—22.

² Genesis xlviii. 7.

³ See p. 252.

⁴ Genesis xlvii. 30.

⁵ Compare p. 255.

⁶ Genesis xlvii. 21, after an amended version.

nothing or for a very low price, from his subjects. Ought he then to have sold it at so high a price in the time of want that all the Egyptians were stripped of everything they possessed, and were compelled within two years to give themselves up as slaves? This is no more right than—possible!

Let us glance for a moment at the country and the people in question.

In the north-east corner of Africa, bounded on the west by the great desert of Sahara, and on the north by the Mediterranean Sea, and separated from Arabia on the east by the Red Sea and the peninsula of Sinai, lies Egypt, the valley of the mighty Nile. This stupendous river, even before it has left the highlands of Abessinia and entered Egypt proper, is already more than three thousand feet in width. The valley fertilised by the Nile and wrested, as it were, from the sands of the desert, is on an average about eight miles broad. On the west it is protected by a range of hills from the all-engulfing sands of the Sahara and the terrible blasts of the desert wind, while it is cut off on the east also by the range of crags and sand-hills that runs along the shore of the Red Sea.

All Egypt is supported by the Nile. Every year, soon after midsummer, when the snow melts on the tops of the mountains among which both streams of the Nile (the Blue and the White Nile) take their rise, and there is a heavy fall of rain, the Lower Nile gradually rises in its bed. Towards the end of July it overflows its banks and floods the whole valley up to the foot of the hills that enclose it, till by the end of September it stands more than twenty feet above the lowest water-mark. Then the river sinks again as slowly as it has risen, and after covering all the land for four months it is once more confined within its banks again. In consequence of its gradual rise and fall, the water leaves a layer

of rich mud behind it all over Egypt, and the air is pleasantly tempered during the hottest season of the year by the extraordinary increase in the expanse of water. It hardly ever rains in Egypt, except in the northern portion, the so-called Delta, which is cut up by the numerous branches into which the Nile is here divided as it flows through its seven mouths into the sea. The nearness of the Mediterranean Sea sometimes causes a fall of rain in this district.

This country was called by its inhabitants "Chemi," that is, *the black*, because of the colour of its soil, which stood off darkly from the glittering white of the downs and the yellow of the plains of sand by which it was surrounded. The name "Egypt" was given to the country by the Greeks; and we find a corruption of this word in the name of "Copts," given to the Christian population of the country.

All the northern coast of Africa, as well as the whole valley of the Nile up to the Abessinian mountains, was inhabited by peoples whose complexion, language, and customs formed a sharp contrast to those of the Negroes who possessed the greater part of Africa. A branch of their language still survives in that of the Berbers. Chief among them all in cultivation and knowledge was the people that dwelt on the banks of the Lower Nile, and founded one of the most ancient of the civilised states of the world.

Our knowledge of Egyptian history goes back to a very high antiquity, though little more than lists of kings have come down to us from the earliest times. More than forty centuries before Christ there was a regular state in Egypt, and arts and sciences flourished there.¹ Indeed the country was well calculated to make its inhabitants thoughtful and energetic. For, though it was very fruitful, it required careful cultivation. The yearly overflowing of the Nile made

¹ See p. 84.

it necessary to take many precautions for the protection of flocks and other possessions from the water ; to observe the period at which the stream rose and fell ; to collect the provisions required for the support of man and beast for months together, while the land was transformed as it were into a sea ; to build boats and pass a great deal of time on the water ; and accurately to fix, measure, and mark out the boundaries of the fields, to avoid constant disputes about them.

As the population increased, it gradually became necessary to find artificial means of bringing the fertilising water to the land that stood too high for it to reach of itself, to rid the marshy districts of their excessive supply, and to prevent the water in general from running off too soon, so as to secure as great a deposit of mud as possible.

Thus the Egyptians were raised, alike by the advantages and disadvantages attached to the nature of their soil, into a thoughtful and industrious people.

Love of freedom, however, was certainly not one of the qualities by which they were distinguished, at any rate in the times of which the memory has come down to us. The oldest monuments of the Egyptians bear witness to their servile disposition. At the head of the nation stood the king, or Pharaoh ; for this is a title, and not a proper name, as might be supposed from certain passages in the Old Testament.¹ The meaning of the word is uncertain. It is generally taken to mean "the king," while some translate it "the son of Ra" (an Egyptian god), and others "the gate." This last explanation is not so out of the way as it sounds. Thus, ever since the time of Osman (about 1300 A.D.) the government of the Turkish Empire has been called "the Sublime Porte," or simply "the Porte," that is, *the gate*. This name

¹ Genesis. xli. 46 ; Exodus vi. 11, &c.

was first given to the principal gate of the palace, and was afterwards transferred to the power which issued its orders through this gate. If "Pharaoh" is correctly translated *the gate*, the word does not properly apply to the person of the monarch, but to the government. It is natural enough, however, that the name should have been applied to the prince himself. For Egypt was a country whose king could say with Louis XIV., the most royal of modern princes: "I am the state." On the Egyptian monuments, accordingly, we see not only labourers and soldiers, but generals, governors, and even priests lying prone upon the ground, bowed down to the dust, in the presence of the ruler. In the beginning of things, so the priests taught, the gods had ruled upon the earth, but they had handed over their jurisdiction entirely to the kings, who were not only called the sons of the gods, but the very gods of the country themselves. They bear the names of "the sun that is given to the world," "the lifegiver," or "the mighty Horus," while the queen is called "the mighty Isis;" Horus being the name of an Egyptian god, and Isis that of a goddess. On the monuments, too, we often find representations of the kings sacrificing to their ancestors, and of the gods serving them. One of the Egyptian princes (Amenophis III., about 1500 B.C.) went so far as to raise a temple for the worship of himself.

Where royalty was regarded in such a light, the authority of the kings must have been unlimited; and a proof that it really was so may be found in the gigantic works they executed; for they could never have carried them out unless they had had free command of the labour of their subjects. Hundreds of thousands of labourers had to toil year after year not only upon canals, from which the people at least derived some benefit, or temples to the building of which their piety may have contributed, but also upon the magnificent palaces and the gigantic pyramids, which only served

to immortalise the names of princes, and furnish them with dwellings in their lives and mausoleums after their death. Sometimes the labourers perished by thousands from exhaustion and insufficient food; but what price was too high to pay for the glory of an Egyptian prince?

It follows naturally from the unlimited character of the royal authority that the Pharoah was really the sole proprietor of the land; for since he had absolute command of the very lives of his subjects, how much more must he have had power over their possessions! This was more or less characteristic of all eastern countries. But in Egypt the rights of the princes with regard to the soil and its produce were more accurately defined than elsewhere, and so attracted the attention of the foreigners who visited the country. The accounts they give, however, do not agree with one another. Our writer tells us, for instance, that all the land belonged by law to the king, who let it to his subjects for the payment of one-fifth of the yield, while none but the priests possessed land of their own. A certain Greek writer on the other hand tells us that the land was divided into three parts, of which one belonged to the king, one to the priests, and one to the soldiers. Another says that King Ramses the Great, of whom we shall have more to say presently, had the whole country divided into equal squares and gave one of them to each Egyptian.

Whether the account of the Israelite or that of the first Greek writer is the true one, in either case the state of things described must have arisen gradually. It is impossible to believe that within the space of a few years a free people became a nation of slaves and that their land passed out of the hands of the people into those of the king. That the inhabitants were suddenly compelled by want to put all their goods and their very bodies at the king's disposal, is just as inconceivable as that once upon a time a prince

divided the country into square fields of equal size and gave each of his subjects one of them. And yet there must be some reason why the king's rights over the land were so much more accurately regulated in Egypt than elsewhere. This reason is not difficult to find. The state, that is, the king, could not fail to gain great power in Egypt, from the fact that a regular and settled government was a pressing necessity there not only on extraordinary occasions, but at all times. For as we have seen already, the fertility of the soil, the welfare of the country, and the peaceable disposition of the citizens towards each other, all depended upon the manner in which the overflowings of the Nile were regulated and the boundaries of the fields marked out. It could not be left to the citizens themselves to make provision for all this. The matter must be taken in hand by the prince himself, who soon gained enormous power by this control of the public works. The feeling, then, of the pressing necessity of co-operation and unity had been stamped upon the Egyptians by their peculiar circumstances from the most ancient times. Thus the two primeval kingdoms—that of Memphis in Lower and of Thebes in Upper Egypt—were united together as early as the year 2300 B.C., and the king was consequently called “the lord of both the countries.” One of these kings, Amenemha III., called Moeris by the Greeks, had a lake of enormous dimensions dug out near Memphis. A canal conducted a supply of water from the Nile into this lake, where it could be collected and retained when the flood was so high that there was danger of marshes being formed. It was allowed to run off again when the river did not rise as high as usual, and the flood was therefore slight. This artificial sea existed for centuries. At last the works were neglected by a careless government, and the water inside broke through and formed a natural sea near the present Fayum.

Now the construction and keeping up of such works as

these, the necessity of testing the condition of the river, and opening and closing the sluices at the right time, so as to regulate the supply of water in the stream, all this not only gave the kings a great deal of power generally, but also gave them a special right over the land, the fertility of which was, to a large extent, dependent upon their care. If we take the story of Joseph, then, in a typical rather than a literal sense, it is perfectly true. The prince who knew how to lay by in time of plenty, so as to have a supply ready for times of want, might well be called Saphnat-Paneah, or deliverer of the country, and no one in Egypt must "raise hand or foot" against his will. It was but right that he should deal with his subjects just as the general interest required, and that they should always have to pay a heavy tribute; for was not he who had command of the waters of the Nile the "life-waker" of the people?

According to our Israelite narrator, the priests of Egypt enjoyed many privileges. They were supported by supplies sent them directly from the king, so that they had no occasion to sell their lands. This sounds simple enough; but the real state of things cannot, of course, be so easily described. For in Egypt, as in every other ancient country, there was a motley mixture of various religions. The Egyptian gods and goddesses were numerous, and their temples, great and small, covered the land. Now one god, and now another, rose to the highest honour, as the preference of the king or some other circumstance dictated; and with the greater or smaller amount of honour that fell to the lot of any deity, the income of the priests, of course, rose and fell; but, generally speaking, they were not only free from the cares of want, but lived in abundance, and exercised a great deal of power, for the Egyptians were a very superstitious people, and nothing is more profitable to a priesthood than this.

According to the story in Genesis, Joseph is taken into the priestly caste ; for the fine linen garment in which he is clothed forms the costume of the priests, who were never allowed to dress themselves in anything but linen. Moreover, he marries the daughter of the priest of On. At the same time the distinctive mark of royalty, the golden necklace, is hung upon his neck, and he is placed in the same rank as the royal princes, for he rides in the king's second chariot, and everyone has to kneel down before him. These two sets of distinctions go very well together, for in Egypt the king was also the high priest. Every other Egyptian had to approach the gods through a mediator, but the king had not.

It appears from what has been said already that the writer of the legend of Joseph was pretty well acquainted with some of the conditions and ideas of Egyptian life ; and he shows the same familiarity with them in his remark that shepherds and goatherds are an abomination to the Egyptians, that Joseph the Egyptian might not eat at the same table with the Hebrews, and that the border land of Goshen was assigned to them as their dwelling place. But we should be quite mistaken if we were to suppose from his words that the Egyptians possessed no sheep or goats, or that the keepers of these animals were held in dishonour among them ; for this was by no means the case. Our knowledge of Egyptian life is principally drawn from the pictures upon the pyramids and the walls of palaces and temples ; and in these pictures we often find flocks of small cattle both at the stall and at pasture ; and, indeed, the story of Joseph itself speaks of them.¹ Ancient historians tell us that the Egyptian shepherds were very clever at their trade, and, amongst other accomplishments,

¹ Genesis xlvii. 17.

showed great skill in the treatment of their sick beasts. In some districts we even find sheep and goats used for sacrifices.

The Egyptians, then, did not hold all shepherds and goatherds in abomination, but they had a rooted aversion to the foreign shepherd tribes that hung upon the north-eastern boundary of their country pasturing sheep and goats. Dislike of all foreigners was remarkably intense in Egypt, but it was more especially against these special tribes that the hatred of the native population was directed. This hatred was not unfounded; for about the year 2100 B.C. the whole kingdom of Memphis fell into the power of certain tribes of Syrian shepherds. They had pushed into the country unexpectedly, and, after having conquered it without much difficulty, had maintained themselves there for more than four centuries. They were called the Hyksos, that is, the *shepherd kings*. At last, about the year 1660 B.C., Upper Egypt rose against them, under the leadership of King Amosis, and succeeded in regaining its freedom; but Lower Egypt long remained in their power. On the eastern bank of the Nile the Hyksos had built themselves a fortified camp, in which they placed their possessions in safety, and from which they ruled the Delta. At last King Thutmosis undertook the siege of this fortress, but he was obliged to consent to a treaty by which the Hyksos, with a force of two hundred and forty thousand fighting men, went off to Syria. The site of this camp was called Avaris [that is, *Hebrews* (?)] and afterwards Pelusium [that is, *Philistines* (?)]. By the year 1580 B.C. Egypt was once more free. So, at least, several scholars have read the old monuments of Egypt; but much of all this is uncertain, and other scholars dispute the justice of this view of the history. It is a fact, however, that the land was oppressed for a considerable time by tribes of Arab shepherds.

It was not unnatural that after this the Egyptians should feel the strongest aversion to all foreigners, and especially to the shepherd tribes that came from the desert of Arabia. The ancestors of the people of Israel were soon to feel this hatred to their cost, as we shall presently see.

CHAPTER XXIX.

RETROSPECT.

AT the end of our First Book we may well pause for a moment, for it would not be surprising were the picture beginning to swim before the eyes of many of my readers, and were they somewhat at a loss to give a reasonable account of what they have been reading. All these legends that place us in such a strange world, and are sometimes at variance with each other, and sometimes so marvelously woven together that it is almost impossible to keep hold of the thread that is to lead us out of the labyrinth—all these legends begin at last to get so inextricably confused that we find it impossible to take a general view of them at all. How utterly different the final impression one retains as a child, when, with no deep thought on the matter, and content with any kind of solution of the difficulties that arise, one drinks in the stories of the first human generations and of the patriarchs—delighting in them, more because they feed the imagination and work upon the feelings than because they are good for the heart or head!

Let us cast a glance backward then, that, while each of the stories still speaks for itself, we may take a general view of the whole.

The first point that excites our attention is the extraordinary manner in which the book of Genesis is put together! We cannot help asking: "How could sensible men by any

possibility write such a book?" For what is it that we have observed? That this book is made up of portions of at least three works. First of all, to begin with the latest, there was a Book of Origins, from which, however, but few of the stories were borrowed. The first account of the creation and Adam's family register formed a part of it. And it also contained an account of the deluge and of God's covenant with the rescued persons, followed by a family register from Noah down to Abraham. But there was not much about the patriarchs in it. The migration of Terah to Canaan, the covenant of God Almighty (El Shaddai) with Abraham, the institution of circumcision, the birth of Isaac, the purchase of the cave of Machpelah, a summary of Ishmael's descendants, the birth of Esau and Jacob, a short account of Jacob's stay with Laban and the mention of the separation of Isaac's two sons, one of whom went to Seir while the other stayed in Canaan, a list of Esau's descendants, the migration of Jacob and his family to Egypt, the adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh by their grandfather, as his own children, and the burial of the latter at Hebron—this is almost all. It is little more than a short epitome of the contents of the traditions current during the writer's lifetime, and does but serve as the introduction to a rather extensive work; for, though we have already gone through Genesis, we have not taken our leave of the Book of Origins yet. On the contrary, we have still to examine its most important sections. Not only are some of the biblical accounts of Moses borrowed from this book, but we shall also find an elaborate system of Israelite law in it, together with a description of the Mosaic religion, according to the writer's idea of it. His review of the fortunes of the generations before Moses is a very suitable introduction to the rest, for he shows us how preparations for the Mosaic religion were gradually made; how God revealed himself to the early generations, not as Yahweh, but

as "God" or "God-almighty;" and how certain commandments, such as the abstinence from blood and the circumcision, had been given to Israel already, before God made his law completely known by Moses. We shall return to this subject in our Fourth Book.

If we remove from the book of Genesis all the stories drawn from the Book of Origins, and leave out of consideration the alterations introduced by the Redactor (that is, the man who made up a single whole out of the older works), we have still a collection of legends which were written by at least two authors, whose accounts, especially in the stories of Jacob and Joseph, are often opposed to one another, but yet are so woven together that it is exceedingly difficult to separate them and read each of them straight through by itself. One writer, whose hand we can trace all through the book, from the story of Paradise down to Joseph's death, ascribes Mosaic usages quite freely to pre-Mosaic antiquity, whereas another never lets these early generations speak of Yahweh or offer sacrifices, but on the other hand represents them as raising anointed stones, a practice which the patriarchs never followed, according to the former writer. There are many reasons for suspecting that this writer, who avoids the name of Yahweh (he is sometimes called *the older Elohist*, because, like the later Book of Origins, he always speaks of *Elohim*, "God"), was an Ephraimite, while the other (the Yahwist) lived in Judah. We shall meet with both these writers again in our Second Book.

We have now given a slight sketch of the way in which Genesis was probably put together. I say "probably," for I have made no attempt, either here or in speaking of the separate stories, to conceal the fact that it is very difficult to arrive at certainty upon every point. No doubt my readers have sometimes become quite perplexed in listening to these

legends so strangely fused together and worked up into a single whole, and now and then the scholars who are trying to separate the whole into its parts feel just the same confusion. Since the middle of the last century, when a French physician published a book to show that Genesis is made up of different fragments, many Biblical scholars have devoted their powers to this question, and though great progress has been made already, we are not at the end of our labours yet.

Many of my readers may be ready to cry out at this point, "How could the Redactor of Genesis possibly go to work in such an extraordinary manner? Why did he so often retain the very words of the old documents, even when they contradicted each other?" No doubt it is strange;—so strange indeed that we can quite understand the ridicule which some people throw upon the idea that the book of Genesis was really produced in this manner. And yet this opinion is no mere idle theory, but is forced upon us by the work itself; for the repetitions and contradictions it contains cannot be explained in any other way. To take a single example, no one who reads the first chapters of Genesis in an unprejudiced spirit can fail to see that two accounts of the creation stand over against each other there; and in the sequel too, we have numerous examples, from the history of Jacob for instance, that speak unmistakably enough. It certainly does show a want of thought on the part of the Redactor, but his case by no means stands alone. We shall notice a similar phenomenon in other books of the Old Testament, especially in Exodus, Samuel, and Kings. Moreover, the students of other branches of Oriental Literature tell us of the same thing. The Arabian historians go to work in the same way. There is an old chronicle, for instance, called the chronicle of Tabari, which is nothing but a collection of traditions, strung together without the least pretence of criticism, full

of repetitions, contradictions, and impossibilities. Other writers have drawn from this work ; that is to say they have given us the same narrative but have altered a little here and there, removed some of the contradictions and omitted some of the most hopelessly improbable stories ; but have also inserted words of a far later date. Lastly, one writer, of somewhat higher culture, who has a definite plan, and may be compared in this respect to the writer of the Book of Origins, uses only so much of the traditionary matter as he requires for his purpose, and makes it into a single whole. But in most cases there is a total absence of all criticism.

Where facts speak we must yield to them, even if we cannot explain them. However strange it may seem, then, we must admit that Genesis, like many other books of the Bible, was put together in this extraordinary manner.

Of the origin and the earliest history of the Israelites, and the tribes related to them, we know, in spite of all the stories furnished us by the book of Genesis, sadly too little. Before Moses, indeed, the Israelites had no history, properly so called.¹ All that we know of their fortunes, and of those of the people with whom they were brought into contact, comes to this :—

A number of Semitic tribes of Arphaxad began, in primeval times, to cross the river Euphrates, and passing onward towards the south-west, pushed into the district that lies between the Mediterranean Sea, the Euphrates, the Persian Gulf, and Egypt. The greater portion of these wandering hordes, the Joktanites, passed into Arabia. Here they gradually established themselves ; but we have no means of knowing whom they found already living there. As to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, west of the Jordan, and the district on the east bank of this river, we have, on the other

¹ See pp. 125—128.

hand, reason to believe that it was inhabited about sixteen centuries before Christ by the Rephaites and Anakites in Canaan, the Horites in what was afterwards Edom, the Zamzummites in the land of Ammon, and the Emites in that of Moab. These tribes long survived, as races of giants, in the imagination of the Israelites, even after the conquest by Joshua.

The Semitic tribes that penetrated in those early ages from the other side of the great river into this district by the sea shore fought for life and death, of course, with the wild aborigines (earliest population), and the result showed that the invaders were the most powerful. They were afterwards called Canaanites, that is, *Lowlanders*, and consisted of various tribes, such as the Sidonians, the Tyrians, the Avvites, and the Amorites. They gradually settled first in Sidon and then elsewhere, and not only expelled the ancient inhabitants, but before long began to fight for possession with one another. For all these tribes did not come at the same time; and it was long before the stream of immigration was stayed. There was a constant forward and backward movement—a succession of efforts to gain a country. Other “men from the farther side” (Hebrews) followed those that had first arrived; and even of this rear-guard, of the continuous migrations of centuries, one section was more successful than another. “The sons of Lot” soon found a dwelling place east of the Jordan and the Dead Sea; “the sons of Esau” established themselves on the mountains between this sea and the Gulf of Elath; the Ishmaelites wandered out eastward into the desert; others, “the sons of Keturah,” penetrated southward and took possession of a portion of Arabia; and some turned towards Egypt and settled in the district east of the Delta. They were not the first of their race with whom the Egyptians had made acquaintance. They had still a lively recol-

lection of all the misery they had suffered from those shepherd tribes of Asia, the Hyksos, and all the difficulty they had had in getting rid of them ; but however strong their aversion was, they were obliged to put up with the presence of these shepherds on their border lands. Never since the days of Thutmosis, probably, had they been altogether rid of these hated neighbours, who certainly wandered backwards and forwards after their expulsion from Egypt, endeavouring to penetrate into Canaan again, or contenting themselves with the desert of Arabia, and repeatedly coming into collision with other tribes from across the Euphrates. Who knows how many of the forefathers of the Hebrews who pastured their flocks in Goshen about 1400 B.C. may have belonged to the former oppressors of Egypt ? The Hebrews themselves, however, had preserved no recollection of anything of the kind. This much alone is certain, that the social condition of the land between the Euphrates and Egypt fourteen centuries before Christ was in a veritable chaos. All kinds of Semitic tribes clashed together there, and fought for a settled home against each other and the fierce tribes of older inhabitants. It was a struggle for life. From some of these tribes, then settled in the land of Goshen, the people of Israel sprang.

The history of Israel, then, begins with Moses. Before his time there did indeed exist certain uncultivated shepherd-tribes, capable, as the result showed, of great things ; but it was impossible to see what would become of them. Moses, by his mighty personality, moulded these rude tribes into something higher, and laid the foundations of a national existence amongst them, while stamping the impress of his own spirit upon their union. But "one sows and another reaps." He who lays the foundations of a national existence does not live to see the nation. Not years, but centuries must pass away before the national

unity was really established, and from the Hebrew shepherds that inhabited the land of Goshen fourteen centuries before Christ, a nation had been formed with its own special character and its own special mission. This only came about in the age of David, and his accession to the throne, therefore, is a turning point in the history of Israel.

In describing this second period we would gladly stand entirely upon historical ground, but it is impossible that our wish to do so should be fulfilled. We shall still meet with a host of legends, and with regard to the fortunes of Moses and his contemporaries, for instance, we shall have to content ourselves with the knowledge of one or two particulars. But the main lines of Israelite history are clear, many facts are established, and, most important of all, several of the chief actors in the history are known to us as individuals. From the darkness then we are coming into the twilight. We can distinguish several great personalities clearly. And, when we look closely, we gradually see a most intensely interesting spectacle rising more and more distinctly into view;—it is the birth of a nation !

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